

DISCOVER - BIBLE GUIDES

The Discover Guides will help you discover answers to some of life's deepest questions, such as:

- How can I find peace of mind?
- Is there hope for our chaotic world?
- Is there life after death?
- How can I find love, hope and security?

Get started finding the answers in the Bible today to these questions and more.

Discover just how relevant the Bible is to life in the 21st century.



Lesson 1

We Can Believe in God



Inside This Lesson

- **Everything Designed Has a Designer**
- **Everything Made Has a Maker**
- **God Comes Into Personal Relationships With People**
- **What Kind of God Is He?**
- **How Jesus Reveals What God Is Like**



Jim once asked an atheist if he had ever wrestled, even for a few moments, with the thought that maybe God does exist. "Absolutely!" the atheist said, to Jim's surprise. "Years ago when our first child was born I almost became a believer in God. As I looked down at that miniature-but-perfect little human being in the crib, as I watched the flexing of those tiny fingers and saw the dawning of recognition in those little eyes, I went through a period of several months during which I almost ceased to be an atheist. Looking at that child almost convinced me there had to be a God."

Everything Designed Has a Designer

The design of the human body demands the existence of a designer.

Have you ever pondered all that's involved in the simple act of seeing? Scientists tell us that the delicate engineering of the eye's cornea and lens make the most advanced camera seem like a child's toy by comparison. The tiny rods and cones in the eye change light into electro-chemical impulses through processes the most sophisticated laboratory can't reproduce. And brain cells transform these electrical impulses into the miracle of perception – something no high-tech computer can come close to doing.

Engineering, chemistry, information processing – all are involved every time we open our eyes. Charles Darwin once stated that the thought of the eye, and how it could possibly be produced by natural selection, made him ill. Here's why:

The human eye could not have evolved over long periods of time, because it is absolutely useless unless complete. The lens, which focuses light, would be useless without the retina, which senses light. And all the light received would serve no purpose without the nerve fibers which carry signals to the brain.

Vision involves a complete system of organs – all interrelated, all thoroughly designed. That's the way it is with the whole human body. Lungs and heart, nerves and muscles, all perform incredibly complicated tasks that depend on other incredibly complicated tasks.

No wonder the Psalmist concluded that the human body speaks loud and clear of a wonderful Creator:

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

—Psalm 139:14. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)



We don't have to go far to find the "works" of God. The evidence right in our own bodies points to an infinitely skillful designer.

If you were to mark ten coins from one to ten, place them in your pocket, shake them around, and then pull each coin out and put it back in your pocket, what is the likelihood you could do so in exact numerical sequence? By mathematical law you have only one chance in ten billion of taking them out in order from one to ten.

Now consider the chances of a stomach, brain, heart, lungs, arteries, veins, kidneys, ears, eyes, and teeth all developing together and beginning to function at the same moment in time.

What is the most reasonable explanation for the design of the human body?

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,' . . . SO GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

—Genesis 1:26, 27.

The first man and woman could not just have happened. The Bible affirms that God designed us in His image. He is the great Engineering Intelligence who thought us up and brought us into being.



Everything Made Has a Maker

But evidence for God is not confined to the design of our bodies; it's also spread across the heavens.

Leave the lights of the city and go out into the country. Look up into the night sky. That milky cloud beyond the stars that we call the Milky Way is really a galaxy, or island universe, of billions of blazing suns similar to our sun. In fact our sun and its planets are a part of the Milky Way.



Now look at the Andromeda star group. See that hazy oval of light. Under a telescope it becomes another spiral galaxy, and like our Milky Way it is composed of billions of giant suns.

Andromeda is but one of an estimated one hundred billion island universes that can be seen through giant telescopes. Astronomers tell us that some of these island universes are actually moving through each other at an incomprehensible speed, all perfectly balanced in space.

Somehow all this motion is synchronized. All the orbits within orbits proceed on track, on time. No wonder the psalmist concluded that the stars speak of a glorious Maker:



“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.”

—Psalm 19:1-3.

What may we reasonably conclude by looking at the intricate design and vast size of the universe?

“[God] is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

—Colossians 1:17.

The Weymouth translation is even clearer: “He is before all things, and in and through Him the universe is one harmonious whole.”

All creation boldly testifies:

“God designed! God created!” From the perfect balance of proton and electron in the atom to the whirl of planets around the sun we find evidence of a master plan, a master thinker, of God the Master Designer and the Infinite Creator.

When an anthropologist, digging in the sands of New Mexico, comes across a triangular-shaped stone, he examines it carefully. If he sees markings on the stone that suggest it has been chiseled into shape, he immediately concludes that an American Indian created the object. He will even attempt to assign a date to the arrowhead, and determine which Indian tribe it belonged to.

No anthropologist worth his salt ever argues that arrowheads got there by chance. No one has attempted to explain that lightning or wind and water could have shaped these objects. It seems perfectly obvious to everyone that a human being made them.

Yet when many scientists dig up fossils, evidence of living things from the past, they make a very different assumption. They don't see the hand of a Creator; they assume these creatures must have been produced by the blind forces of nature, that they just naturally evolved.

The animal fossils we discover, even those buried deepest in the geologic layers, represent creatures infinitely more complex than any arrowhead. So why not draw the obvious conclusion: someone had to create them? The Bible suggests a logical answer to the question of origins:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
—Genesis 1:1.

In these simple words, “in the beginning God,” we find the answer to the mystery of life. The first doctrine recorded in the Bible is that there is a God; in fact, this first verse in the Bible tells us of His mighty act of creation. Dr. Arthur Compton, Nobel prize-winning physicist, commenting on this verse of Scripture, once said:

“For myself, faith begins with a realization that a supreme intelligence brought the universe into being and created man. It is not difficult for me to have this faith, for it is incontrovertible that where there is a plan there is intelligence—an orderly, unfolding universe testifies to the truth of the most majestic statement ever uttered – ‘In the beginning God.’”

Many great scientific minds today believe in God. The book *Behind the Dim Unknown*, edited by John Clover Monsma (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons), contains twenty-six chapters, each chapter written by a scientific researcher who is both a specialist in his field and also a Christian. Each author emphasizes the same fundamental truth – God exists.

In the words, “in the beginning God,” we find the foundation of all existence. The Bible does not attempt to prove God – it declares His existence. That God exists is proved by our own existence and also by the existence of the things we see around us. Every effect must have an adequate cause. There is design in this world, hence there must be a designer. There is mathematical plan in the universe, so there must have been a planner. All things, then, must have been created by some being, and that being is God.

Dr. Arthur Conklin, once a biologist of Princeton University, wrote: “The probability of life originating from an accident is comparable to the probability of an unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a print shop.”

We know that human beings can't create something from nothing. We may construct things, invent things, put things together, make things work, but with all our wisdom, we have never brought into being from scratch even the smallest spear of grass or the tiniest toad or the simplest flower.

Who, then, did make all things? Who created them in the beginning? Who started them? There is only one satisfactory answer – God.

The things about us cry out that God designed, God created, God sustains. Only life – or its ultimate Source – produces life. The only plausible answer to the origin of the universe, this world, and human beings – is God.

God Comes Into Personal Relationships With People

The God who designed the starry heavens, who created the universe, comes into personal relationships with people. Deep in the mind and heart of every individual, God has revealed a knowledge of His existence. He is “the true light that gives light to every man” (John 1:9).

The Bible asserts that our Creator seeks personal relationships with us. Abraham “was called God's friend” (James 2:23). “The Lord would speak to Moses . . . as a man speaks with his friend” (Exodus 33:11). And God will enter into a personal relationship with you and become your Friend. Jesus promised those who follow Him: “You are my friends” (John 15:14).

Human existence itself supports the idea of a personal God. We all know it to be a fact that personality exists here on this earth. We are persons, our friends are persons. Since there is personality, there must be a personal God as its cause. It is impossible for human beings to exist without a personal Creator back of them. Since there is individual personality, it is logical to conclude that a God who is also a Person is responsible for creating personalities.

About 2500 years ago a group of Greek philosophers discussed the question, “What is the briefest possible definition of man?”

Plato suggested: “Man is a two-legged animal.”

Another philosopher, however, exposed this definition's limitations by fetching a rooster. He held it up and said, “Behold Plato's man!”

They pondered in silence a few moments until one of the thinkers exclaimed, “I have it! Man is a religious animal.”

That's it in a nutshell. Humanity is incurably religious. We alone feel a sense of need for a Higher Power. All of us, whether atheistic or devout, have wrestled with the idea of God. We're distinguished from animals by our imagination and reason, and by our will to choose right or wrong. No animal ever builds an altar for worship. Yet everywhere you find men and women, you find them worshipping. Deep within every human heart is a desire to worship, “a consciousness of God.”

God has placed within all of us a desire to come into companionship with Him. When we respond to our longing and find God, there is no longer a doubt about His existence and our need.

During the 1990s millions of atheists in Russia renounced atheism and turned to God. A university professor in St. Petersburg whose field is astronomy made a statement that typifies the comments made by many transformed atheists in the former Soviet Union:

“I have searched for a meaning to life in my scientific research, but found nothing to have confidence in. The scientists around me feel the same vacuum. As I looked at the vastness of the universe in my study of astronomy, and the emptiness of my soul, I felt there must be some meaning. Then, when I received the Bible you gave me and began reading it, the vacuum in my life was filled. I have found the Bible to be the only source of confidence to my soul. I have accepted Jesus as my Saviour and have found true peace, comfort, and satisfaction in life.”

A Christian believes in God because he or she has met Him and discovers that He satisfies the heart's deepest needs. The God whom Christians have joyfully found to exist, gives us a new perspective, new meaning, new motives, new purposes, and new joys.

God doesn't promise a life free from trouble and conflict, but He does assure us that He will guide and sustain us if we come into a personal relationship with Him. And millions of Christians will testify that they would give up everything rather than go back to life without God.

This is the greatest wonder of all – that the Almighty God who designed all creatures and created and sustains the galaxies also desires a personal relationship with every man and woman, boy and girl. David marvelled at this, when he wrote:

***“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what
is man that you are mindful of him?”***

—Psalm 8:3, 4.



Our Creator is “mindful” of each one of us. He takes as personal an interest in you as if you were the only being He had created.

So we can believe in God:

1. Because of the intricate design in everything He created about us.
2. Because of the longing for God within us that leaves us restless till we find our rest in Him.
3. And because when we seek and find Him, God satisfies our every need and longing – to the full!

Now, it's only reasonable that a personal God would want to reveal Himself to His created beings just as a father desires that his children know him. And God reveals Himself to us in the Bible. (Guide 2 will give evidence that the Bible is a reliable Book given to us by the God who created us.)

What Kind of God Is He?

In the Bible God tells us who He is and what He is like.

What pattern did God use for creating men and women?

***“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.”***

—Genesis 1:27.

According to Scripture, we are made in God's image. This is why we can have a personal relationship with Him. Our abilities to reflect and feel, to remember and hope, to ponder and analyze – all are derived from Him.

Since God has a personality, what is His dominant trait?

“God is love.” —1 John 4:8.

God relates to human beings out of His own heart of love. There is nothing He has done or ever will do which is not motivated by a selfless, sacrificial love.

How Jesus Reveals What God Is Like

What family member gives us an idea of what God is like?

“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?”
—Malachi 2:10.

In the Bible God repeatedly speaks of Himself as a father.

Some of the father images we see today are anything but desirable. There are neglectful dads, dead-beat dads, abusive dads. God is not like that. Rather, He is a caring, sensitive Father. He is the kind of Dad who loves to spend time with his son or daughter, the kind of Dad who charms his kids by telling wonderful bedtime stories.

God, our loving Father, wanted to do more than reveal Himself through the words of Scripture. He knew that a person we live with is much more real to us than someone we only hear about or read about in a book. So He decided to enter our world as a real, specific individual.

God came down on our level – He became like us – so He could teach us how to live and be happy, and so we could see what God is really like.

How did God visit the world as a person?

“[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God.”
—Colossians 1:15

God came down to our world in the person of Jesus.

A small boy and his older brother, were standing before a large portrait of their father who had died when the younger boy was a mere babe.

“Tell me,” the younger brother said, “just what was Father like?”

The older boy attempted to tell his little brother something about their father. He described his strength. He said he was a good man, kind and handsome. He was friendly, and people liked to be with him. He was always gentle with Mother. He made people happy.

In spite of all the older brother could say, the small boy could not form a satisfying picture of his father. He wanted so much to know what his father was like. At last he interrupted his brother with the question, “Tell me one thing, Henry, was Father anything like you?”

The older boy hesitated a moment, then said: “Well, friends of ours who knew Father best say that I’m the living image of him. And even Mother says the same.”

With his heart all aglow, the small boy walked away, saying: “Now I know exactly what my dad was like. He was just like my brother Henry.”

Jesus came to our world as God in human flesh. Jesus is “the Son of God” (Mark 15:39)—God made visible, the thought of God made audible. Jesus Himself said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

So if you have seen Jesus, you have seen God Himself. Whenever you want to know what God is like, then look at Jesus as the Bible reveals Him.

As you read the story of Jesus in the four Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament, you will discover a fascinating portrait of our Heavenly Father. Rough, self-sufficient fishermen dropped their nets to follow Christ, and small children flocked to receive His blessing. He could comfort the most devastated sinners and disarm the most self-righteous hypocrites. He healed everything from blindness to leprosy with the quiet assurance of a doctor prescribing a couple of aspirin. His two-word command: “Be still!” forced a violent storm to calm down like a naughty child brought suddenly to its senses. In all His actions Jesus demonstrated that God is love! He met human need in a way no one had ever done before Him – or has since!

Jesus' final glorious revelation of what God is like happened at the cross. That's where He died for us so that we would not have to die forever ourselves.

How do we benefit from Christ's death?

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

—John 3:16

Jesus died not only to give us a happier life now, but also to give us eternal life. Jesus is God's “one and only Son” – He is unique, one of a kind. He is the one and only being who is both wholly God and wholly man.

For long ages people wondered, and hoped, and dreamed about God. They saw His handiwork in the sky and in the beauties of nature. Many thought to themselves, “If only God were like this!” or, “If only God were like that!” But the beautiful, self-sacrificing life of Jesus and His death on the cross revealed God more clearly than ever. People found themselves looking into the very face of God, seeing Him as He really is – love, eternal and immortal love!

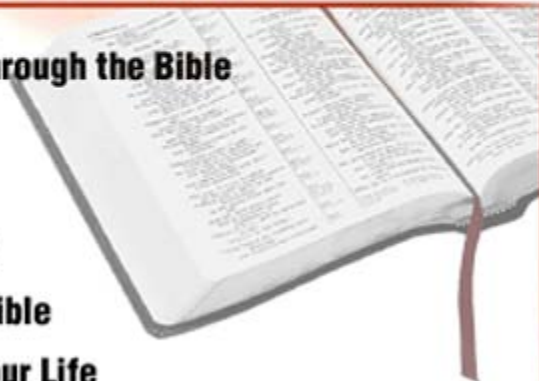
You can discover God right now as Jesus reveals Him. That discovery will lead you to make a very personal affirmation: “Father, I love you!”

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **2**

We Can Believe the Bible

- **How God Speaks to Us Through the Bible**
- **Who Wrote the Bible?**
- **The Unity of the Bible**
- **Can You Trust the Bible?**
- **How to Understand the Bible**
- **The Bible Can Change Your Life**



We Can Believe The Bible

The famous mutineers who sank the British ship *Bounty*, ended up settling with their native women on the lonely island of Pitcairn. The group consisted of nine British sailors, six Tahitian men, ten Tahitian women, and a girl of fifteen. One of the sailors discovered how to distill alcohol, and soon drunkenness corrupted the island colony. Fighting among the men and women grew into violent exchanges.

After a while only one of the original men who reached the island survived. But this man, Alexander Smith, discovered a Bible in one of the chests taken from the ship. He began to read it and to teach the others what it said. As he did so his own life changed, and finally the lives of all on the island.



The islanders were completely isolated from the outside world until the arrival of the United States ship *Topaz* in 1808. Its crew found the island a thriving, prosperous community with no whisky, no jail, no crime. The Bible had changed the island from a hell on earth to an example of what God wants the world to be.

And so it is today. We know because the Voice of Prophecy is in contact with the island of Pitcairn through shortwave radio. Tom Christian, a descendant of the *Bounty* mutineer Fletcher Christian, is a ham radio operator and talks to us each week.

Does God still speak to people through the pages of the Bible? He certainly does. As I write this, I'm looking at the answer sheet sent to us by a student of one of our Bible courses. A note at the bottom states, "I am on death row in the Utah State Prison. Before I took this Bible course, I was lost, but now I have some-thing to look forward to, and I have found a new love."

God uses the Bible in a powerful way to transform people's lives. Wherever people really begin to study the Bible, lives are dramatically changed.

How God Speaks to Us Through the Bible

After creating Adam and Eve, the first man and woman on earth, God spoke to them face-to-face. But when God came to visit with Adam and Eve after they sinned, what did the couple do?

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and THEY HID FROM THE LORD GOD among the trees of the garden.”

—**Genesis 3:8.** (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

Sin interrupted face-to-face contact with God. After sin came to our world, how did God communicate with people?

“Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”

—**Amos 3:7.**

God has not left us in the dark concerning life and its meaning. Through His prophets—persons God called to speak and write for Him—He has revealed His answers to life’s great questions.

Who Wrote the Bible?

The prophets gave God’s messages by voice and pen while they lived, and when they died, their writings lived after them. These prophetic messages were then gathered together, under God’s leading, in the book we call the Bible.

But how reliable are these writings?

“You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

—**2 Peter 1:20, 21.**

The Holy Spirit revealed to the prophets the messages of Scripture. The writers of the Bible wrote not according to their own will or whim, but only as they were moved, or controlled, by the Spirit of God. The Bible is God’s own book!

In the Bible God tells us about Himself, and reveals His purposes for the human race. The Bible is a book of history, of prophecy, and of promise, outlining God’s whole plan of salvation. It not only shows God’s view of the past, but also opens up the future, telling us how the problem of evil will finally be resolved and how peace will finally come to our world.

Is all the Bible a message from God?

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for

every good work.”

—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

The Holy Bible affects human beings so profoundly because “all” the Bible is “God-breathed.” It’s more than a nice collection of moral principles; it’s more than a great book; it’s an inspired document, God’s Book. The prophets related what they saw and heard in human language, but their message came directly from God.

If you want to know what life is all about, honestly and prayerfully read the Holy Scriptures. You’ll find your attitude and outlook gradually changing. The more you study—and are thus exposed to the Spirit of God, the real author of the Bible—the more peace of mind you’ll experience. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets to write the Bible, will make the Bible teachings, its gospel, effective in transforming your life if you invite the Spirit to be present as you read the Bible.

The Unity of the Bible

The Bible is actually a library of 66 books. The 39 books of the Old Testament were composed from 1450 B.C. to 400 B.C.; the 27 books of the New Testament between A.D. 50 and A.D. 100.

The prophet Moses began the first five books of the Bible sometime before 1400 B.C. The Apostle John penned the last book of the Bible, Revelation, about A.D. 95. During the 1,500 years between the writing of the first and last books of the Bible, at least 38 other prophets made their contributions.



The various Bible writers lived at different times, some separated by hundreds of years. In many cases they were complete strangers to one another. Some were businessmen or traders, others were shepherds, fishermen, soldiers, physicians, preachers, kings—human beings from all walks of life. They served under different governments, and lived within contrasting cultures and systems of philosophy. But here is the wonder of it all: When the 66 books of the Bible with their 1,189 chapters made up of 31,173 verses are brought together, we find perfect harmony in the message they convey. As the great scholar F. F. Bruce noted: “The Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together.”

Suppose a man should knock at your door and, when invited in, place an oddly shaped piece of marble on your living room floor, then leave without a word. Other visitors follow in succession until about 40 individuals have each deposited their numbered marble piece into place.

When the last one has gone, you see with surprise that a beautiful statue stands before you. Then you learn that most of the “sculptors” had never met each other, coming, as they did, from South America, China, Russia, Africa, and other parts of the world. What would you have to conclude? That someone had planned the statue and had sent to each man accurate specifications for his particular piece of marble. The Bible as a whole communicates one coherent message—just like a perfect marble statue. One mind planned it all, the mind of God. Scripture’s remarkable unity gives evidence that it is not simply human literature but indeed the Word of God. Human beings wrote down the thoughts and words, but they were “God-breathed,” inspired by God Himself.

You Can Trust the Bible

1. The preservation of the Bible is remarkable. All of the early manuscripts of the Bible were copied by hand—long before there were printing presses. Scribes made copies of the original manuscripts and distributed them. Thousands of copies of such manuscripts or portions of them still survive.

Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament that go back 150 to 200 years before Christ were found near the Dead Sea in 1947. It's amazing that these two-thousand-year-old scrolls contain exactly the same truths as we find in the Old Testament of Bibles printed today. Powerful evidence of how reliably God's Word has been transmitted to us!

The apostles first wrote much of the New Testament as letters they sent to Christian churches established after the death and resurrection of Christ (Colossians 4:16). More than 4,500 manuscripts of all or a part of the New Testament are on display in the great museums and libraries of Europe and America. Some of them date back to the second century. By comparing these early manuscripts with today's Bible, we can readily see that the New Testament has also remained essentially unchanged since it was first written. Remarkably enough, we are much more certain about the original text of the Bible than we are about the original text of Shakespeare's plays.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, once the director of the British Museum, in his book *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* assures us: "The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries."

Today the Bible or portions of it have been translated into over 2,060 languages and dialects. God's Word remains the world's best-seller; over 150 million Bibles and Bible portions are sold each year.

2. The historical accuracy of the Bible record is remarkable. At the time the United States was becoming a nation, many were skeptical about the accuracy of Scripture. They doubted the Bible record because they could not prove biblical events from the documents of secular history. Scripture spoke of battles, cities, and even entire civilizations which secular historians did not mention.

Today many archaeological discoveries have dramatically confirmed the accuracy of the biblical record. Historians have discovered clay tablets and stone monuments which have brought to light names, places, and events previously known only from the Bible.

For example, according to Genesis 11:31, Abraham and his family "set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to [the land of] Canaan." Because only the Bible spoke of Ur, certain scholars stated that no such city had ever existed. Then archaeologists uncovered a temple tower in southern Iraq with a cylinder at the base written in cuneiform that contained the name Ur. Later finds revealed Ur as the thriving metropolis of a highly developed civilization. That city's identity had been forgotten and lost to later historians. Only the Bible preserved its name—until the spade of the archaeologist confirmed its authenticity.

Ur is but one of many examples of archaeological information that now confirms the accuracy of Bible history. You can obtain fascinating books on biblical archeology from your local public library. Such books give hundreds of other examples of how history proves the historical reliability of Scripture.

3. The accurate fulfillment of Bible predictions shows that you can trust the Bible. Our confidence in the Word of God can also be strengthened by a look at Bible prophecies. Scripture contains many remarkable predictions of future events that are now being fulfilled before our very eyes. You will examine one of these exciting prophecies in guide 7. You will discover that God revealed the entire future course of history in advance from 606 B.C. (before Christ) right down the centuries to our day. This prophecy also looks into the future and tells us what is coming in our world today.

How to Understand the Bible

Remember that the Bible is not some historical document which only scholars can understand. Some of the most exciting biblical insights have come from ordinary people with ordinary educations who simply responded to the Bible as a personal letter from Jesus. As you explore God's Word, here are seven important principles to keep in mind:

1. Study the Bible with a prayerful heart. If you approach Scripture with a heart and mind opened through prayer, the Word truly becomes a personal contact with Jesus. Remember to invite the Spirit in as your teacher when you open the Bible.

“When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. . . . he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you”

—John 16:13-14. 2.

2. Read the Bible daily. Paul commended the Berean Christians because “they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scripture every day to see” what was true (Acts 17:11). Daily Bible study is a key to power in our lives (Romans 1:16)

3. Study the Bible carefully. Paul told Timothy to study the Bible as “a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Don't just grab any stray text that seems to suit your opinions or inclinations and hang on tight. Look as carefully and as objectively as possible at what is being said in the passage. Reading the Bible is an encounter with the mind of God.

4. Study the Bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and book by book. As you read it, let the Bible speak for itself. Since the Bible is a message from Jesus, it is not only true, but the test of all truth (Isaiah 8:20). So we should never let any “religious” belief or principle explain away any part of Scripture. Trying to make the Bible fit into a preconceived idea will only cause us to “distort” the Scriptures to our “own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16, KJV).

Make sure you understand each statement of the Bible in the light of its context: who is being spoken to, what problem it refers to, what other statements surround it, etc. The key question is: What did the Bible writer intend to say? All of us must learn to distinguish what the Bible writer intended to say from our subjective impressions: what we think the writer should have said. After grasping what a text means we can apply it intelligently to our life today.

5. Study the Bible by subject. To really understand Bible truth, we must let the Bible be its own interpreter. How? By comparing scripture with scripture. Jesus used this method to demonstrate that He was the Messiah:

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in ALL the Scriptures concerning himself.”

—Luke 24:27.

By putting together all that the Bible has to say on a certain subject we gain a balanced perspective; we can more accurately reflect on God's point of view. For example, how do you find the secrets of successful prayer? Gather together all the statements made by the prophets, Jesus and the apostles, the promises and principles they gave, which relate to prayer and its answers. (That's essentially what we do in guide 14.) When we prayerfully

let the Bible explain itself in this way, we come to understand what God means, and not just what some person thinks, or what some church creed asserts.

6. Study the Bible to receive power to live for Christ. The Word of God is described in Hebrews 4:12 as a sharp, double-edged sword. It's more than words on a page, it's a living weapon that God uses to help us fight off the most persistent temptations.

7. Listen as God speaks to you through His Word. If a person is to know the Bible truth about a certain subject or doctrine, he or she must be willing to follow what it teaches.

“IF ANYONE CHOOSES TO DO GOD’S WILL, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

—John 7:17.

The psalmist exemplified a healthy attitude:

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.”
—Psalm 119:9.

The Bible Can Change Your Life

What is the effect of the Bible in a person's life?



“The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”

—Psalm 119:130.

Study of the Bible will strengthen the “understanding,” the intellect, as no other book. If you deeply examine the Bible and absorb its teachings into your life, it will give you the strength to overcome destructive habits and enable you to develop into the fullness of personhood—physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually.

The Bible speaks to the heart. It deals with the experiences of humanity—birth, love, marriage, parenthood, and death. Scripture heals the deepest wound in human nature—humanity's fall into sin and the misery resulting from it.

Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a great revival began to sweep over atheistic Russia. Millions accepted the Bible as inspired by God and became Christians. Galena, a woman in Nishni Novogorod, formerly Gorky, attended the meetings of an American evangelist. With tears running down her cheeks, she told him, “Before I came to these meetings, I was an atheist. I didn't believe in God. Now I have accepted Jesus, and I am a brand new person inside. The truths you have been teaching us from the Bible have opened my eyes.”

God's Word is not a book of one race, one age, one nation, or one culture. Although written in the East, it also appeals to men and women in the West. It enters the apartment of the humble and the mansion of the wealthy. Children love its exciting stories. Its heroes inspire young people. Parents find in it wisdom to instruct their children. The sick, the lonely, and the aged discover in it comfort and hope for a better life.

Because God works through the Bible, it has great power. It breaks even hearts hardened against all human emotion, softening and filling them with love. We have seen the Bible change a former bandit and opium smoker into a zealous preacher.

We have seen the Bible turn a liar and a cheat into an honest and upright teacher. And we have seen this Book snatch people from the brink of suicide and give them a hopeful new beginning. The Bible awakens love among enemies. It makes the proud humble and the selfish generous. The Bible strengthens us in weakness, cheers us in despondency, comforts us in sorrow, guides us in uncertainty, and soothes us when weary. It shows men and women how to live courageously and how to die without fear.

God's Book, the Bible, can change your life too! You'll see that more and more clearly as you continue studying the DISCOVER guides.

For what reason was the Bible written for us? Jesus answers:

“The Scriptures . . . testify about me.”

— John 5:39.

“But these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

—John 20:31.

The greatest reason we should become acquainted with the Holy Scriptures is that it is full of pictures that reveal Jesus Christ and assure us of eternal life. By looking at Christ throughout the Bible, we are changed and become more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). That is Scripture’s real purpose. This will become even clearer as you study guides 3 through 6.

Begin now to discover the written Word, the living Word, for God uses it to make us more like Jesus.

Lesson **3**
Does My Life
Really Matter to God?

DISCOVER
online

- **God the Creator**
 - **Six Days to Make Our World**
 - **The Introduction of Evil**
 - **Who Is the Devil?**
 - **Did God Create the Devil?**
- ...and much more!



Does My Life Really Matter To God?

Some mornings, the world seems a paradise. You wake up, take a deep breath by the window, and look out on golden sunshine spreading color on the trees, leaf by leaf. Some moments make life seem so precious: the face of a beloved friend as you say good-bye, a sublime piece of music that perfectly matches your mood, the unexpected affection of a small child.

But other mornings, the world seems a place of horror. You wake up to newspaper headlines screaming about yet another terrorist bombing that's maimed or blinded some child, yet another serial killer claiming his tenth victim, yet another famine or war or earthquake. There are moments when nothing makes sense, nothing seems fair. You hear about young missionaries speared to death by the tribesmen they have come to help and at the same time learn of Mafia bosses enjoying their grand-children at their lavish estates.

What does it all mean? Can we make sense of our wonderful and terrible world? Does God have a purpose for it? Why are we here? Does my life really matter to God or am I just a minor cog in some vast cosmic machine?

God Made a Perfect World

Let's start with the fact that God is the Creator, the architect and designer of everything, from supernovas to butterfly wings.

How long did it take God to perform His mighty miracle of creation?

“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”

— **Psalm 33:6-9.** *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

God has only to speak, and the electrons, protons, and neutrons scurry off to obey His will. He obviously doesn't need long ages of time to accomplish His purposes. We limit His power if we say that God requires millions of years to bring about the evolution of the world or its creatures. He can take time if He chooses, or He can dispense with it altogether.

Six Days to Make Our World

How long did God decide He would take to make our world?

“In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

—Exodus 20:11.

The eternal, all-powerful Creator could have formed the world in a moment “by the breath of His mouth.” But when God decided to create our inhabitable world, He chose to take six days to do it. He didn’t need six days—six minutes would have been sufficient, or even six seconds.

The first chapter in the Bible, Genesis 1, describes what God created on each day of the creation week. Read it when you can.

Creation Week

Day One: light; sequence of day and night

Day Two: earth’s atmosphere

Day Three: dry land, vegetation

Day Four: sun and moon appeared

Day Five: birds and fish

Day Six: land animals, man

Day Seven: the Sabbath

What crowning masterpiece of creation did God bring into existence on the sixth day?

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule . . . over all the earth. . . .’ SO GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE, in the image of God he created him; MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM.”

—Genesis 1:26, 27.

God decided to create individuals like Himself who could reason and feel and love. Every human being is made in God’s “image.” That’s the first Good News statement from the Bible that will help us understand ourselves.

“The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

—Genesis 2:7.

By the sixth day, the world was filled with plants and animals, and then God was ready to introduce His masterpiece of creation; the Almighty formed Adam’s body from the dust of the ground. So when God breathed “the breath of life” into his nostrils, man became “a living being”—that is, he came to life.

God named the first man Adam, a word that simply means “man” (verses 19, 20). And to complete His act of creating people in His image, God made the first woman, called Eve, which means “living” (verses 18-25; 3:20). A loving Creator saw the need for human companionship.

Fresh from the hand of God, Adam and Eve both reflected His image. The Almighty could have programmed beings to wander contentedly about the Garden of Eden and raise their hands in adoration on cue. He could have created actors to play flawless parts for Him. But God wanted more: real relationships. Animals can make nice house pets, but they can't carry on a stimulating conversation. Robots can smile, speak courteously, and even do the dishes, but they can't love.

That's why God made people. He could have given us no greater honor than to create us in His image, with the capacity to think and decide, to choose and remember, to understand and love. Adam and Eve were the crown of God's creation. They were His children, and therefore inexpressibly dear to Him.

Evil Comes to a Perfect World

When God created Adam and Eve, they had everything to make them happy. They enjoyed perfect physical and mental health, living in a beautiful garden home in a flawless world (Genesis 1:28-31). God promised them children and the ability to do creative thinking, and to find satisfaction in the work of their hands (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). They experienced face-to-face fellowship with their Maker (Genesis 3:8). No trace of worry, fear, or sickness marred their blissful days.

We still, on occasion, catch an echo of that original Eden during moments when life seems indescribably precious. But what about the other side of life? How did the world change so drastically into a place of suffering and tragedy? The second and third chapters of Genesis tell the entire story of how sin entered our world. Read them at your leisure. Here is a brief summary of their contents.

Some time after God established a perfect world, the devil came to the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve into disobeying their Creator. God limited the devil's sphere of influence to one tree in the garden, the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." And He warned the first human couple to stay clear of this tree and never to eat its fruit, for that would result in death.

But one day Eve wandered over by the forbidden tree. The devil quickly launched into his sales pitch. He claimed God had lied to her and that if she ate the tree's fruit she wouldn't die but would become wise like God Himself, knowing good and evil. Until then Adam and Eve had known only good. Tragically Eve, and then Adam, allowed the devil to con them and they sampled the forbidden fruit—thus breaking their bond of trust and obedience with God.

God planned for Adam and Eve to "rule" over our world as the stewards of God's created works (Genesis 1:26). But because they broke faith with God and, by default, chose the devil as their new leader, the couple lost their jurisdiction. That was the first critical step that eventually led to a planet in rebellion against God. Today the devil claims the world as his turf and tries his best to enslave its people.

There are many times when we find ourselves doing something selfish or even cruel when we really want to do the opposite. Why? Because there is an evil force at work in our world. The invisible enemy, the devil, works to make people fail morally. Many of the senseless, vicious crimes we read about with dismay are the result of individuals who've consciously or unconsciously given themselves over to the control of this evil power and who find themselves doing things they could not have imagined before.

As you read chapter 3 of Genesis, you will discover that sin caused Adam and Eve to hide from God in fear. Sin affected all of creation adversely. It was like throwing a wrench in a smoothly running machine. Thorns appeared along with the flowers. The soil suffered from drought and labor became a burden. Disease began to strike at random. Jealousy and animosity, suspicion and greed started multiplying human miseries. Most terrible of all, with sin came death!

Who Is This Devil Who Infected Our World With Sin?

The New Testament mentions the devil, or Satan, nearly one hundred times. The Bible clearly teaches that there is a real, personal devil.

What insight does Jesus give us into the character of the devil?

“He [the devil] was A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and THE FATHER OF LIES.”

—John 8:44.

According to Jesus, the devil is the originator of sin in the universe, the “father” of sin and thus of murder and lying.

Thomas Carlyle, the great English philosopher, once took Ralph Waldo Emerson through some of the worst streets of London’s East End. As they walked along, silently observing the wretchedness and evil around them, Carlyle finally asked, “Do you believe in the devil now?” We might extend such a walk to the hospitals, prisons, and inner cities of today’s world, or follow the TV cameras into battles which maim and kill innocent civilians, and then ask, “Do you believe in the devil now?”

Did God Create the Devil?

According to Jesus, where did the devil come from?

“I saw Satan fall like lightning FROM HEAVEN.”

—Luke 10:18.

How does the Bible further describe the devil’s fall from heaven?

“And there was WAR IN HEAVEN. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and THE DRAGON AND HIS ANGELS fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they LOST THEIR PLACE IN HEAVEN. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

—Revelation 12:7-9.



Did God create the devil? No! Everything God makes is perfect. A good God would not produce a devil. And yet the Bible states that the devil, along with the angels he had deceived, lost their place in heaven and came to our world where he carried out a successful coup: wresting the stewardship of the world from Adam and Eve.

Where did the devil come from? How did he get into heaven in the first place?

“You were anointed as A GUARDIAN CHERUB, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. YOU WERE BLAMELESS IN YOUR WAYS from the day YOU WERE CREATED till WICKEDNESS WAS FOUND IN YOU.”

—Ezekiel 28:14, 15

According to this scripture, God did not create the devil, He created a perfect angel, and this angel gradually turned himself into a devil. Satan actually began his career as one of heaven’s leading angels, standing next to God’s throne. But then he sinned—”wickedness was found in” him. Expelled from heaven, and posing as Adam and Eve’s friend, he became humanity’s deadliest enemy.

When you see cartoons portraying the devil with horns, a tail, and split hoofs, remember that the Bible is not so naive. In Scripture we discover that God’s great enemy was once the most beautiful and wisest of the holy angels.

Why Did the Devil Sin?

If God created the devil as a perfect angel, why did he become a sinner?

“How YOU HAVE FALLEN FROM HEAVEN, O morning star, son of the dawn! YOU HAVE BEEN CAST DOWN TO THE EARTH, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds. I WILL MAKE MYSELF LIKE THE MOST HIGH.’”

—Isaiah 14:12-14.

The being who became the devil was originally called Lucifer, meaning “day star” or “shining one.” Somehow, in this angel’s heart, vanity and ambition began to take the place of devotion. The seed of pride grew into an obsession to actually take God’s place. God had already given him a very high position in heaven as a leader of the angels. But he wanted even more. Growing more and more jealous of God, he sought to seize God’s throne.

Lucifer must have worked very hard to persuade other heavenly beings that he had a better plan. It is easy to imagine Satan arguing that God was holding something back from them, and that the divine law was too restrictive, and that God was an uncaring sovereign. He slandered the name of the One whose character defines what love is.

How was this conflict in heaven resolved?

“Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth.”

—Ezekiel 28:17.

When Lucifer’s heart became proud and he chose to rebel, God had to cast him out of heaven. Why? Because pride and selfishness, which are sin, and at the root of all sin, cannot exist in the presence of God.

Lucifer twisted love for God into an unhealthy love of self. Jealousy changed the chief of angels into the devil or Satan. And in order to preserve the peace and harmony of heaven, he and one third of heaven's angels, those who joined him in rebellion, had to be expelled (Revelation 12:4, 7-9).

Who Is Responsible for Sin?

Why didn't God create beings incapable of sinning? If He had, there would be no problem of evil in our world.

To answer that question we must go back to why God created us in the first place. He wanted people who could have meaningful relationships. So God did something that only He would think of: "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27).

This means we are free and responsible. We can decide to love God or turn our backs on Him.

What special ability did God give people and angels that distinguishes them from animals?

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."

—Joshua 24:15.

God gave the people of Joshua's day, as well as the angels and human beings of every generation, a spiritual nature and a capacity to make real choices. He challenges the beings He created in His image to choose to do right because their reasoning powers tell them "God's way is best." And to turn from wrong because their reasoning powers warn against the results of disobedience and sin.

The Lord didn't have to make us free moral agents. But only beings with the power to reason and choose can experience real love. God longed to create individuals who could comprehend and appreciate His character, freely respond to Him in love, and be filled with love for others.

God wanted to share His love so much that He was willing to take the enormous risk of creating angels and people with the power of choice. He knew it was possible that some day one of His created beings might choose not to serve Him. The devil was the first being in the universe to make that terrible choice. The tragedy of sin began with him (John 8:44, 1 John 3:8).

The Cross Makes Possible the Destruction of Sin

But why didn't the tragedy of sin stop with Lucifer? Why didn't God destroy him before his sin-disease could spread? It's important to remember that Lucifer had challenged the fairness of God's government. He had told lies about God. The idea of telling a lie had never entered the minds of the angels. Naturally they didn't grasp all that lay behind Lucifer's deceptions.

If God had destroyed Lucifer immediately, the angels would have begun to serve Him from fear rather than from love. This would have defeated the very purpose He had in creating beings with the power of choice in the first place.

How did anyone really know God's way was best? No one had dared to try an alternative. God gave Satan a chance to demonstrate his alternative system. That's why he was given an opportunity to make his pitch to Adam and Eve. This planet has become a testing ground where the character of Satan and the nature of his kingdom are contrasted with the character of God and the nature of His kingdom. Who is right? Who can we ultimately trust? These are the issues which "the great controversy between Christ and Satan" must resolve.

So deceptive was Lucifer, that before all the universe could be fully convinced, the nature of his alternative had to be fully exposed. It has taken time for everyone to really grasp how disastrous Satan's alternative actually is. But eventually everyone will see that "the wages of sin is death" and that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Every being in the entire universe will then agree with the declaration:

"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

—Revelation 15:3, 4.

After everyone understands the deadly nature of sin and the destructive nature of Satan's philosophy, God can destroy Satan and sin. He will also have to destroy those who stubbornly resist His grace and cling to Satan's alternative. (More about this in guides 22 and 23.)

God is just as anxious to resolve the problem of sin and suffering as we are to have Him do so. But He is waiting until He can do it on a permanent basis, and until He can both preserve our free will and prevent evil from ever appearing again.

How certain can we be that God will destroy sin forever?

"The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up [margin]. . . . But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

—2 Peter 3:10, 13.

When God does finally say of sin, “It is done!” (Revelation 16:17), sin will be truly finished for all time. It will never again infect the universe. Sin’s tragic results will stand out so clearly that disobedience to God will seem repugnant for all eternity.

What makes possible the final destruction of the devil and sin?

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he [Christ] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

—Hebrews 2:14, 15.

At the cross the angels and the unfallen worlds saw Satan for what he was—a deceiver, a liar, a murderer. There he revealed his true character by compelling men to murder the innocent Son of God. The inhabitants of the entire universe saw how senseless and cruel sin really is. The cross fully unmasked Satan’s motives, and when God destroys the devil and those who persist in sin, all will acknowledge that God is just.

Jesus’ death on the cross made the removal of sin from the universe a certainty, because it exposed Satan’s real intent before all created beings (John 12:31, 32). The cross also revealed Christ for what He is—the Saviour of the world. At Golgotha the power of love stood out in stark contrast against the love of power. It established beyond any question that it was self-sacrificing love that motivates God in all His dealings with Satan, sin, and sinful men and women.

At the cross Christ’s eloquent demonstration of God’s unconditional love overpowered the worst that men and Satan could do. The devil was decisively defeated. The battle had been over who should rule the world, Christ or Satan. But the cross settled it for all time. It must be Christ above all!

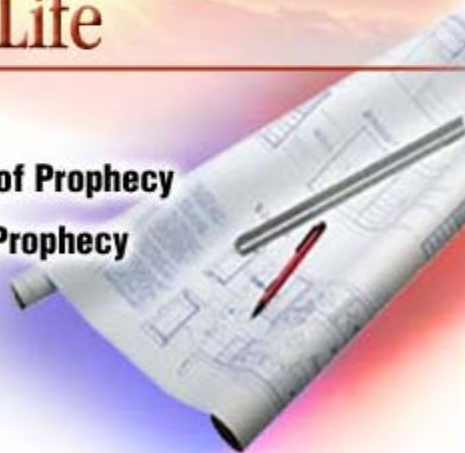
Have you discovered a relationship with the Saviour who died to reveal His matchless, unchanging love? How do you feel about the One who came to our world as a human being and died in your place to save you from the results of sin? Will you bow your head just now and thank Jesus, and then ask Him to come in and take possession of your life?

Dear Father in heaven: I thank You for Jesus’ victory over Satan in this world. Thank you for offering forgiveness so graciously from the cross. Please come into my heart just now and fight for me against the evil in my own nature. Please take possession of my entire being. Help me to stay close to Jesus each day. I thank You for hearing my prayer in Jesus’ name. Amen.

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **4** A Plan For Your Life

- The Origin of Christ
- Christ, the Heart and History of Prophecy
- Christ's Life a Fulfillment of Prophecy
- More Than a Feeling
- Submitting to God's Plan



A Plan For Your Life

After a minister had spoken on the subject, “Why I Believe in Jesus,” a well-dressed young man paid him a visit in his study and remarked, “Your talk tonight was interesting, but everything you said about Jesus Christ came out of your Bible. Tell me, if Jesus ever lived on this earth, why doesn’t history tell about Him?”

“That’s a fair question,” the minister answered as he turned and took down several books. “But as a matter of fact, history does tell about Jesus Christ.”

“That I’d like to see for myself,” the young man responded.

“Well here is Letter 97 of Book 10 of Letters of Pliny the Younger, Roman proconsul in Bithynia, a province of old Asia Minor. Pliny wrote to the Roman Emperor, Trajan, telling him about events in his province. See, here he is asking counsel on how he should handle a new sect, the Christians. He tells of their rapid growth and of how they sang hymns composed to their leader, Christ. Pliny sent his letter about A.D. 110. The letter by Pliny offers historical evidence of the man, Christ, and of the spread of His faith in the days of His apostles.”

Surprised, the young man said, “Tell me more!”

As the minister thumbed through another book, he added, “Another historian, contemporary with Pliny, was Tacitus. In his Annals (Book 15, chapter 44) he tells of Nero’s hatred for, and persecution of, the Christians at the time of the burning of Rome. Tacitus explains that the term ‘Christian’ comes from the name ‘Christ.’ He mentions that Jesus Christ, the founder of the Christian religion, had been put to death by Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea, during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. All these details Tacitus gives us match exactly the events, names, and places given in the Bible.”

“Pastor, I never knew things like that were in secular history!” the visitor exclaimed.

“And while we’re talking,” the minister added, “I want you to notice that about A.D. 180 Celsus wrote a book attacking Christians, indicating that Christianity by that time had become a force to reckon with.

“If you are still in doubt, remember that the four Gospels are just as much history as these secular books.”

This young man went away convinced that Jesus Christ was a real, historical figure.

Both sacred and secular history agree that Jesus did live as a man on earth. But there’s much more we can know about Him.

Sources for the above historical material and a more detailed history appear in the following books: ***Documents of the Christian Church***, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson (London, Oxford University Press); Joseph Cullen Ayer, ***A Source Book for Ancient Church History*** (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931, 1941); ***Origen: Contra Celsum***, translated by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: University Press, 1965); F. F. Bruce, ***The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*** 5th edition, revised (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960; and R. T. France, ***The Evidence for Jesus*** (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986). The last two books come in inexpensive paperback editions and should be available through most religious bookstores. If the first three books are not available in your local library, you can ask the librarian to order them for you through inter-library loan.

Christ Existed from Eternity

According to the Bible, Jesus was not merely a good man, He was also God. What claim did Jesus Himself make concerning His divinity?

“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

—John 14:7-9.

“I and the Father are one.”

—John 10:30. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

If you wish to know the answer to the questions, “Who is God? What is He like?” just look at Jesus. The Father shares the same love and care for each person that Jesus demonstrated during His human life on earth.

What matching claim did John make concerning Jesus’ divinity?

“In the beginning was the Word [Christ], and THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD. He was with God IN THE BEGINNING. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

—John 1:1-3, 14.

Jesus, the Word, is as fully God as is the Father. Jesus was with God “in the beginning.” He was the One who spoke all things into existence.

How long have the Father and the Son existed together?

“But to the Son He [God] says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom’.”

—Hebrews 1:8, NKJV, (The Holy Bible, New King James Version, copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.)

God the Father and Jesus the Son have existed together from eternity. There never was a time when Jesus was not one with the Father.



Christ, the Heart of History and Prophecy

One of the things that makes Jesus utterly unique is this: His biography was written before He was born. Christ's life story is a fulfillment of prophecy. Old Testament prophecies present a clear outline of Christ's life in advance. The New Testament is His life story told in fulfillment.

We know the Old Testament was completed, at the very latest, 250 years before Christ's birth; because the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, was begun about that time. No wonder that in writing the Gospels of the New Testament, Christ's disciples were amazed at how accurately details in their Master's life fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

Anyone who carefully reads the Old Testament discovers that it continually mentions the coming Messiah. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God immediately promised them that He would send someone to our world to defeat the devil (Genesis 3:15). That Person, Scripture further reveals, would be the Messiah. The Hebrew word "Messiah" in the Old Testament, which literally means "Anointed One," corresponds to the Greek word "Christ" in the New Testament (see John 1:41; 4:25). Jesus Christ is the Messiah. That's a central premise of the New Testament.

Living from five hundred to fifteen hundred years before Christ's birth, the Old Testament prophets made scores of very specific predictions about the life of the Messiah. Their prophecies identify the city of Christ's birth, His name, and His lifework. They disclose details of His trial and events connected with His death. The prophecies show that when brought into court He would offer no personal defense, and they actually predict some of the very words He would speak in His dying hours. Even the year, the day, and the hour of His death are foretold. Messianic prophecies also reveal that He would come to life again on the third day.

At the very beginning of Christ's earthly ministry, as people compared His life with Old Testament prophecies, what did they conclude?

"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

—John 1:45.

At His first public appearance, our Saviour appealed to prophecy to establish His identity. After quoting from an Old Testament passage, He declared:

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

—Luke 4:21.

Shortly after His resurrection, in what words did Jesus again remind two of His followers about the fulfillment of the prophecies that pointed forward to Him?

"He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe that all the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the [Old Testament] Scriptures concerning himself."

—Luke 24:25-27.

Fulfilled prophecies give convincing evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Christ's Life a Fulfillment of Prophecy

Let's look at a few of these prophetic passages from the Old Testament—and their fulfillment in the New Testament record of Christ's life.

His Place of Birth

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“But you, BETHLEHEM Ephrathah, . . . out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

—Micah 5:2, NKJV.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“Jesus was born in BETHLEHEM in Judea.”

—Matthew 2:1.

His Virgin Birth

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The VIRGIN will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [God with us].”

—Isaiah 7:14.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because WHAT IS CONCEIVED IN HER IS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus [the LORD saves].”

—Matthew 1:20, 21.

His Lineage from the Tribe of Judah

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“THE SCEPTER WILL NOT DEPART FROM JUDAH, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs.”

—Genesis 49:10.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“For it is clear that OUR LORD DESCENDED FROM JUDAH.”

—Hebrews 7:14.

His Rejection

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“He was despised and REJECTED by men.”
—Isaiah 53:3.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“He came to that which was his own, but HIS OWN DID NOT RECEIVE HIM.”
—John 1:11.

His Betrayal

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“Even MY CLOSE FRIEND, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”
—Psalm 41:9.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“Jesus answered, ‘It [the betrayer of Jesus; cf, verse 21] is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to JUDAS ISCARIOT.”
—John 13:26.

The Fee Paid His Traitor

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER.”
—Zechariah 11:12.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?’ So they counted out for him THIRTY SILVER COINS.”
—Matthew 26:14, 15.

His Death on a Cross

The Old Testament Prophecy:



“They have **PIERCED MY HANDS** and my feet.”

—Psalm 22:16.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“When they came to the place called the Skull, there **THEY CRUCIFIED** him.”

—Luke 23:33.

Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 contain a graphic depiction of the Messiah’s persecution and death at the hands of those whom He came to save.

His Escape from the Tomb

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“Because **YOU WILL NOT ABANDON ME TO THE GRAVE**, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”

—Psalm 16:10.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that **HE WAS NOT ABANDONED TO THE GRAVE**, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.”

—Acts 2:31, 32.

Christ’s life story is a continuous fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Peter Stoner, in the book *Science Speaks*, examined these predictions in the light of probability theory. Of the 60 major Messianic prophecies he selected just eight and calculated this: “The chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10 to the 17 power.” (That’s 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.) The evidence is strong that Jesus didn’t just happen to fit a few predictions. His biography was indeed written beforehand by supernatural means. Truly, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.



One of the main reasons the disciples of Jesus, many of whom were at first skeptical of His claims, came to believe so passionately was because they saw Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in every detail of His life. A disciple named Apollos, for example, “vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18:28).

The eyewitness testimony of Peter, John, and Luke compels us to take seriously Christ’s claim to be God’s Son (2 Peter 1:16; John 20:30, 31; Luke 1:1-4). After looking at the evidence, we need to make a prayerful decision about who is going to be Lord in our lives. If you have not already done so, will you place your life in Jesus’ hands?

A God-Planned Life

Jesus lived a God-planned life, one outlined hundreds of years before His birth. Always conscious of this fact, He remained sensitive to God's leading. Christ said:

"I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.... I always do what pleases him."

—John 8:28, 29.

Just as God planned the human life of Jesus before His birth, even so the heart and mind of God has a plan for every human being. He knows how each of us can fulfill our deepest desires and find an abundant life.

Ray wasn't always so sure He wanted to submit to God's plan. He nursed fears in the back of his mind: "If God is really in control of my life maybe I'll end up in 'darkest Africa.'"

But when Ray faced a big decision about where to go to college, he decided for the first time in his life to seek divine guidance on the subject. He prayed for several days and tried to listen for some answer. After a while he seemed to get very clear reasons on why he should choose Option B: a less expensive, but huge and impersonal university in Western Illinois. So Ray reluctantly registered. Soon after starting classes he got acquainted with some wonderful Christians who belonged to Campus Crusade for Christ. His experience with them during the next two years radically changed his life.

A few years later Ray faced another big decision: whether to remain in Japan a second year on a teaching assignment or return to the States. He decided to ask for specific guidance again and God impressed Him with some clear reasons why he should stay. At the beginning of this second year Ray received a totally unexpected opportunity to produce evangelistic films. This had always been his big dream, his long-term goal, but now, it seemed, God was making it happen—in the place he'd least expected.

When Ray looks back today, he notes that every time he has faced a major decision and sought divine guidance, God "opened up a whole new area of my life." Ray writes: "This kind of well-plotted-out existence makes you want to exclaim, 'Listen Lord, if there's anything at all on your mind, PLEASE let me know.'"

How can you know God's plan for your life? God guides in several ways:

1. The Bible.

According to the psalmist, what is life's Guidebook?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”
—Psalm 119:105.

What does Paul tell us we should learn from the life experiences of Bible characters?

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.”
—1 Corinthians 10:11.

God's Word renews our minds and gives us insight (Romans 12:2, Psalms 119:99). Instead of just plopping your finger down on a random text to catch some guidance, try to absorb the mind of God—by studying and meditating on many texts, the whole of God's Word. A regular time of prayerful study in Scripture is the best way to get our priorities straight.

2. Providential circumstances.

God also guides us by divinely-directed circumstances. Psalm 23 pictures Him as the Good Shepherd. A shepherd leads his sheep through lush valleys as well as through rocky ravines. He is capable of helping his charges benefit from and learn from every experience. We have a Shepherd who sticks close by our side. (Compare 1 Corinthians 16:8, 9.)

3. Direct communication of God to the heart.

God also guides us by speaking to our conscience. Paul affirmed that believers receive God's guidance through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:10). He proclaimed to the believer that the Spirit can enlighten the “eyes of your heart” (Ephesians 1:18). In a later DISCOVER guide on the subject of prayer we will find that prayer enables us to talk directly with God. The more consistently we practice communicating with God, the more He is able to guide us. He molds both our inner impressions and our reasoning and judgment so we can see clearly the next step we need to take.

The Guides Must Harmonize

It's possible, of course, to assume you are living a God-directed life when you are merely following your own inclinations and impulses. The Bible cautions us about just such a trap:

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”
—Proverbs 16:25.

Our feelings must harmonize with Bible teaching. In fact, it's not safe to conclude that God is leading us unless all three of the guides discussed above harmonize.

Take Jake, for example. He had a lovely wife and two children, but stumbled into an affair with another woman. How was he to reconcile his behavior with the Bible's strong words about adultery? He told his friends: I've prayed about it and I feel it's God's will.”

Jake's emotions and “inner impressions” clearly sent him down the wrong path. He imagined that it was somehow “providential” that he'd met this other woman and didn't step back to look at this relationship in the light of biblical teaching. Bible commands against adultery, and counsel on how husbands should honor their wives, could have shown Jake the devastating consequences of his affair and that he was mistaking biological urges for divine impressions.

What is the final test for determining a right course of action?

“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn [no light in them, KJV].”
—Isaiah 8:20.

The Bible, “the law and the testimony,” is our final arbiter, our authoritative guidebook. We must never allow any impression or apparently providential circumstance lead us away from a biblical principle.

Submitting to God's Plan

When the devil came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, he attacked Jesus on the issue of submission. Would the Saviour try to fulfill His destiny by expediency, by using the world's methods, or by submitting unconditionally to the Father's will? The devil suggested, "If you will only forego the painful sacrifices your Father has planned for you, I'll give you the world in the palm of your hand—with fame, fortune, and a comfortable lifestyle." Satan even quoted Scripture in an attempt to lead Jesus astray. But each time Jesus fought him off with the words, "It is written" (Matthew 4:1-11).



One powerful lesson we can learn from the life of Jesus is submission to the Father's will. Even amid the terrible agony of Gethsemane, He cried out, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). After three years of His Ministry, living day by day in harmony with the Father's plan, Christ's dying words were: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus was really saying, "My God-planned life is now complete and fulfilled."

As you begin to hear God's voice speaking coherently through His Word, providential circumstances, and direct impressions, you can learn to accept His guidance wholeheartedly. You too can discover the joy of a "well-plotted-out existence," a God-guided life.

Dear Father: Thank You for sending Jesus to this world to defeat Satan. Thank You Jesus for coming willingly to save me from my sins and show me life in all its abundance. My heart is warmed and moved by such love. Father, I want You to guide my life just as You guided Jesus' life. Please come in as Lord of my heart and mind. In Jesus name, Amen.

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **5**

Bridge to a Satisfying Life

- **Satisfying Our Inner Hunger**
- **Bridging the Chasm of Sin & Death**
- **Seven Facts You Should Know
Know About Jesus**
- **Unfailing Love**



Bridge To A Satisfying Life

They found his skeleton beside a makeshift shelter on a desolate island in the mid-Atlantic. The anonymous seaman kept a journal which detailed his four-month ordeal. He'd been set ashore on Ascension Island by the Dutch fleet in 1725 for some unmentioned crime. Soon he was reduced to drinking the blood of turtles just to quench his raging thirst. The man's physical suffering was intense, but an even greater pain stands out in his journal: his overwhelming guilt.

He penned tormented entries such as: "What pangs do wretched mortals feel who leave the paths of righteousness, pleased to increase the numbers of the damned." This seaman's greatest isolation on that lonely island came from his sense of separation from God. That is what proved unbearable in the end.

Human beings have been struggling with that isolation of the heart ever since Adam and Eve "hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" after eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:8). The strange new emotions of shame, guilt, and fear compelled that first couple to run away when God came calling. Those feelings are unfortunately quite familiar to us now.

What is it that causes a separation between us and God?

“Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”

—Isaiah 59:2. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

Sin throws up barriers; it separates us from God. But this great gulf that isolates sinful human beings from a holy God is not His doing. God didn't run away from Adam and Eve—they ran away from Him.

Satisfying Our Hidden Hunger

Before sin spoiled the picture, Adam and Eve enjoyed intimacy with their Creator in a beautiful Garden of Eden. Tragically, they bought into Satan's lie about becoming as wise as God and broke the bond of trust with their Maker. Their sin resulted in alienation, an alienation which quickly extended to the first family, tearing it apart (Genesis 3:15 to 4:8). Separation from God did indeed result in death, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

After being expelled from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve found life a lot tougher on the outside. Childbearing and tilling the soil now came with blood, sweat, and tears. But much harder to endure was the emptiness of heart that began to plague them. Their intimate bond with God broken, they found themselves vulnerable to all kinds of hidden longings, unsatisfied desires, painful yearnings. They were not unlike that seaman abandoned on an island, surrounded by the greatest tragedy of all: the loneliness of sin.

What condition now exists for all humanity?

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way DEATH CAME TO ALL MEN, because ALL SINNED.”

—Romans 5:12.

Since Adam and Eve's first act of rebellion, "all," (the entire human race) have fallen into the same sin pattern and are subject to death, sin's ultimate penalty.

Since we have lost our connection with God through sin, we all experience a great hunger of the heart for that which we've lost, a longing for a kind of security which only God can give. We often try to satisfy that hunger in temporary ways: a shop-till-you-drop binge at the mall, a mad race for promotion at the office, a cruise to the Caribbean. Sometimes we try to simply drown out the hunger with alcohol, drugs, or promiscuity.

Our nameless yearnings and unfulfilled drives are basically symptoms of a loneliness for God. And there is no cure except experiencing His love in our life.

What is the only way to satisfy the hunger of the human heart?

“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

—Psalm 16:11.

Real satisfaction will only come when we get off the island, when that gap between us and God is bridged and we're able to walk over into His presence.

Bridging the Chasm of Sin and Death

God's heart ached on the day Adam and Eve turned their backs on Him. And He still grieves over human sorrows and tragedies. God is eager to satisfy our hidden longings and to heal our emotional wounds. He wasn't content just to look sympathetically across the chasm of sin and death that separates us from Him. He decided to build a bridge.

How did God Himself become a bridge across the chasm?

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

—1 Timothy 1:15.

Jesus put His body on the line, so to speak. He laid Himself down as a sacrifice for sin, paying the death penalty Himself. And He made His life of perfect righteousness freely available to all who seek forgiveness at the cross. The cross of Christ bridges the gap between our restless yearning and the peace and joy God can give. It connects the land of sin and wasted living with the country of inexhaustible life.

Why was Jesus willing to come?

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

—John 3:16, 17.

By coming to our world, Jesus made the contrast between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom dramatically clear. His life, death, and resurrection made it possible to forgive and save sinners without trivializing sin, and gave the universe a demonstration of the true character of both Christ and Satan. The bridge of Christ's broken, bleeding body draws men and women back from the trap of sin. Love spans the chasm, enabling all who place their faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord to walk over into eternal life.

Seven Essential Facts You Should Know About Jesus

These seven facts about Jesus are not true of any other man who has ever lived.

1. Jesus Came From Heaven to Earth

How is Jesus identified?

“And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

—Isaiah 9:6.

Though Jesus was born of a human mother (Matthew 1:22, 23), He is God—God in human flesh. How long did Jesus claim to have existed?

“Before Abraham was born, I am!”

—John 8:58.

Jesus notified the world: "I am" the self-existing One, I have always existed and always will.

Dwight L. Moody, the Billy Graham of the 19th century, once said of the incarnation of Jesus, "It would have been a great sacrifice for Jesus to come and be rocked in a silver cradle, be nursed by an angel, and be fed with a golden spoon. But the Creator of heaven and earth came and took man's flesh, and was born in a stable of poor parents in the worst possible environment."

Why did Jesus come to our world?

An angel told Joseph at the time of Jesus' birth:

“She [Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS.”

—Matthew 1:21.

Jesus, the Creator of the universe (John 1:1-3, 14), was willing to come to our world to rescue us from sin and death. His very name is a promise that enables weak human beings to find true happiness and eternal life.

2. Jesus Lived a Sinless Life

“Jesus the Son of God, . . . has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.”

—Hebrews 4:14, 15.

Jesus lived a real, flesh-and-blood life of moral perfection. God did more than try to talk us out of a life of sin and into a more satisfying one. He laid out His best argument in the life of Christ. By going through all the trials of human existence, Christ made a life free from sin far more attractive than any sermon ever could.

Satan, Christ's great adversary, plotted throughout Jesus' earthly life to seduce Him into sin. When Christ fasted in the Judean wilderness after His baptism and before He began His public ministry, the devil unleashed his

fiercest assault against the Messiah's integrity (Matthew 4:1-11). And during the long night in the Garden of Gethsemane before Christ's crucifixion, the pressure of temptation reached such intensity that Jesus sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

No one else has had to face such an intense and protracted demonic assault. But Christ stood firm against everything the devil could throw at Him—"yet without sin." Jesus experienced the full range of human problems and temptations. He understands our struggles and needs. He is able "to sympathize with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15).

Why was it necessary for Jesus to live a sinless life?

"God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

—2 Corinthians 5:21.

We might paraphrase this passage, "God made Jesus, who was sinless, to be sin for us; and in place of our sinful life Jesus gives us His sinless life, that we might be made sinless in Him." Jesus overcame temptation and lived a sinless life with the express objective of passing it on to us in exchange for our old life of sin. That is how sinners are justified—declared righteous before a holy God solely on the merits of Christ.

3. Jesus Died to Take Away Sin

How many people have sinned?

"For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

—Romans 3:23.

What is the penalty for sin?

"The wages of sin is DEATH, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

—Romans 6:23.

Why did Jesus die?

"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, CHRIST DIED FOR US" (Romans 5:7, 8).

"Look, the Lamb of God, who TAKES AWAY THE SIN of the world!" (John 1:29).

All of us have sinned and are subject to eternal death—the ultimate penalty for sin. But Jesus "became sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21), He died in our place, thus paying the death penalty for us. His act in dying is a gift, therefore "the GIFT of God is ETERNAL LIFE in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

One day in the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz, the commandant announced that ten prisoners must die because a man had just escaped. Ten names were read on the parade grounds. When the last one heard his name called, he sobbed in agony: "My wife and my children!"

Suddenly an older prisoner pushed his way toward the front. It was Father Maximillian Kolbe, a saintly man who managed to share the love of God even amid the horrors of Auschwitz. "Herr Kommandant," Kolbe said, "please, sir, may I take his place?"

The dumbfounded SS officer ordered Kolbe to join the other nine on their way to Block 13. In its dark, fetid basement they were to be starved to death. During the next several days, the men could hear prayers and songs of praise coming from Kolbe's cell. Finally he was killed by injection with carbolic acid.

Father Kolbe had lived a life of heroic virtue in the most trying circumstances. But he was willing to lay it down freely for a stranger in need. Love like that is almost beyond human comprehension. But Jesus laid down His perfect, righteous life as a gift—for the most unworthy. Because of His death "we have PEACE with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

4. Jesus Arose from the Dead

Jesus' death on the cross wasn't the end of His remarkable story. He couldn't very well remain dead and be our Saviour. He is still very much at work in our world.

"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost."
—1 Corinthians 15:17, 18.

Mohammed and Buddha have presented to the world some great philosophical truths. They have inspired the lives of millions of people, but they have no supernatural power to give life since they still remain in their graves.

Because Jesus rose from the tomb the third day after His death (Luke 23 and 24), what promise is He able to make to us?

"I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I HOLD THE KEYS OF DEATH and Hades."
—Revelation 1:18.

Only Jesus has demonstrated, by coming out of the tomb, that He can overcome the grim specter of death. What additional promise did the resurrected Christ make to us?

"Because I live, you also will live."
—John 14:19.

Jesus is alive! The One who appeared after death and announced, "I am the Living One," can now offer us life that is both abundant and eternal. He will live in our hearts if we invite Him in (Revelation 3:20).

Is the risen Christ present to meet our needs today?

"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
—Matthew 28:20.

Men and women all over the world are sharing stories of how Christ has delivered them from the worst addictions and the deepest emotional traumas. A chorus of testimonies point to the power of the risen Christ.

One of our former students wrote these words of gratitude on one of his answer sheets, "I was an alcoholic. One day after leaving the bar, I saw a card in the gutter advertising your Bible course. I picked it up, filled it out, and received my first true knowledge of Christ. Shortly after taking the Bible course, I offered my heart to God and lost the taste for whiskey."

Jesus took possession of this man's life and gave him the ability to overcome addiction. A new power had entered his life, one that proved stronger than his old compulsions. Because Christ is the risen Saviour, He can save all who will come to Him for help.

5. Jesus Ascended to Heaven

Some time after His resurrection, Jesus returned to the Father:

"After he [Jesus] said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

—Acts 1:9.

Just before His ascension, what promise did Jesus make to His followers?

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

—John 14:1-3.

6. Jesus Ministers as Heavenly Priest

Jesus constantly seeks to prepare you for a place in heaven. His whole purpose in coming, living, dying, rising from the dead, and ascending is to make salvation available to people everywhere. The following words of Scripture clearly portray His goals for us:

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.... For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

—Hebrews 2:14-18.

According to this scripture, Jesus came into our world on a rescue mission:

- To deliver people from the misery of enslavement to sin.
- To reconcile men to God by ministering as our merciful and faithful High Priest.
- To ultimately eradicate the cause of sin, suffering and death by destroying the Devil.

Jesus as our priest, our Mediator, continually appears in the Father's presence on our behalf. The same Jesus who blessed the children, rehabilitated the woman caught in adultery, and forgave the dying thief is working in heaven right now to minister to our needs. "He is able to help those who are being tempted."

7. Jesus Will Return

Before returning to heaven, what promise did Jesus make?

“If I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME BACK and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

—John 14:3.

When Jesus returns, He will deliver us once-and-for-all from the sin, sickness, tragedy and death that plague this planet. He will welcome us into a new world of eternal happiness and eternal life—in the presence of God. DISCOVER guides 7 to 10 will explore what will happen when Jesus comes back.

JESUS...

CAME as God in human flesh.

LIVED a sinless life in our place.

DIED for our sins.

AROSE to deliver us from death.

ASCENDED to prepare a home for us in heaven.

MINISTERS each day as our high priest.

IS COMING SOON to take us to be with Him forever.

Unfailing Love

The story is told of an arranged marriage in Taiwan between U Long and a young woman named “Golden Flower.” When U Long lifted the veil from his bride after the ceremony, he was shocked and disgusted. The woman’s face had been scarred by smallpox.

After that, U Long had as little to do with his wife as possible. She tried her best to make him happy; she worked hard at home, hoping her husband would eventually accept her. But he remained coldly indifferent to all her expressions of affection.

Golden Flower lived almost like a widow. After twelve years of this sham marriage, U Long began to lose vision in both eyes. A doctor told him he would go completely blind if he didn’t have a cornea transplant. But the operation was expensive and there was a long waiting list. Golden Flower began to work long hours in the evening making straw hats for extra money. One day, U Long was informed that someone’s cornea had been made available after an accident. He rushed to the hospital to have the operation.

After he had recovered, he grudgingly decided to see his wife so he could thank her for raising the money. When he turned her bowed head so she could look at him, U Long gasped. She stared at him with sightless, blank eyes, the cornea gone. Overcome with emotion, he sank at her feet and sobbed. And then for the first time in their marriage he whispered her name: Golden Flower.

Jesus longs for a relationship with those who’ve been indifferent to Him for so long. He longs for us to finally whisper His name as our Saviour. He was willing to sacrifice not only His eyes but His whole body in order to demonstrate His unfailing love. His love is so powerful that Christ “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Christ’s great sacrifice has created a bridge that spans our indifference, that covers our alienation. Have you personally discovered that He wants to draw you over the chasm and into His arms. Will you respond and pray,

*“Jesus, I love You. Thank You for Your incredible sacrifice. Come into my heart and save me now—
save me wholly, save me completely, save me eternally”?*

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **6** A Second Chance At Life

- What It Means to Be “Lost”
- Do We Need Saving?
- Who Can Save Us?
- Three Simple Steps to Salvation
- The Joy of a Second Chance



A Second Chance At Life

Letters like this, from one of our students, can really make your day:

You've done the most fantastic job with people I would have written off as faithless losers (including myself). You helped one friend find the way out of drugs; you helped another friend find her way out of her seemingly useless existence (she was a self-made atheist and proud of it). Although I wasn't an atheist, I didn't know how to communicate with God, and I would have never guessed that it was through Jesus Christ. But I've found Him, and I've never been so happy in all of my life. Thank you.

These young people have found the only way to a second chance at life—Jesus! They've made the all-important discovery that, while it is a terrible experience to be lost, it is a fantastic experience to find salvation! What is the only solution for someone trapped in sin?

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”

—**Romans 1:16.** (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

The gospel is a saving power to sinful individuals who believe fully in Jesus and accept Him into their lives.

The young people in the above letter accepted Christ by placing their trust in Him and giving Him their allegiance. The power of God, the power of the gospel, transformed their lives, and they now enjoy an ever-growing friendship with Jesus.

What It Means to Be Lost

Just as there are two kinds of life—spiritual life and physical life—so there are two kinds of death—spiritual death and physical death. It's possible for a person to be physically alive—walking around town, doing business, having what some call a good time—and still be dead—that is, spiritually dead.

“As for you, YOU WERE DEAD IN YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS AND SINS, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”

—**Ephesians 2:1, 2.**

Satan leads a spiritually dead person down a descending spiral of sin and disobedience. But the wonderful truth of the gospel is that God loves such doomed people. He loves them while they are falling away from Him, dead in sins, and offers them a full and free deliverance from their predicament.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, MADE US ALIVE WITH CHRIST EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN TRANSGRESSIONS . . . [to] show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

—**Ephesians 2:4, 5, 7-9.**

God loved us when we had nothing lovable about us. His grace created in us a spiritual resurrection to a new life in Christ. We can't change ourselves, but God can. He gives us a second chance at life.

From What Do We Need to Be Saved?

In order to grasp the salvation Christ offers, it's important to clearly understand our need.

1. We need to be saved from sin.

How many have sinned?

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
—Romans 3:23.

To put it bluntly: we don't live up to what we know is right. A parent under stress may blow up and wound a child emotionally. A commuter may become incensed at another driver and almost cause an accident. A student may grow resentful and whisper unkind things about her rival. A businessman may plan to "forget" about a certain source of income at tax time. "All have sinned;" that's the human condition.

How does the Bible define sin?

“All wrongdoing is sin.”
—1 John 5:17.

We need to be rescued from all kinds of unhealthy habits and compulsions: lying, abusive anger, lust, and bitterness to name a few. The Bible defines wrongdoing as breaking God's moral law that He summarized in the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20.

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”
—1 John 3:4.

So we need to be saved from sin—wrongdoing, violating God's commandments.

2. We need to be saved from a broken relationship with God.

“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God.”
—Isaiah 59:1, 2.

Unforgiven sin cuts off our relationship with God, the Lifegiver. There can be no love relationship without faith or trust in God. That is why Jesus spoke of sin as unbelief (see John 16:9). Christ came to restore trust in God, which Satan had undermined.

3. We need to be saved from eternal death, the penalty for sin.

“Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”
—Romans 5:12.

The Bible here has in view eternal death, a death from which a person cannot be resurrected.

4. We need to be saved from a sinful, unhappy life.

For the sinner, life is a dead-end street because a life of sin leaves an empty, aching void in his or her existence.

5. We need to be saved from a sinful world.

We must be rescued from a world full of sin and its results—misery, heartache, loneliness, war, sickness, evil, and death!

Who Can Save Us?

1. Jesus can deliver us from sin.

“You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

—Matthew 1:21.

A Hindu told a Christian friend, “I find many things in Hinduism not found in Christianity, but there is one thing Christianity has that Hinduism does not have—a Saviour.” Christianity is the only world religion that offers people a Saviour.

2. Jesus can save us from our broken relationship with God.

One of the metaphors God uses to describe a Christian’s relationship to Him is that of marriage. To those who’d recently become Christians at Corinth, Paul wrote:

“I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.”

—2 Corinthians 11:2.

To another church he wrote:

“You were separate from Christ . . . without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

—Ephesians 2:12, 13.

A person who comes to Christ experiences the same joy that a couple experiences during courtship and marriage. When he or she commits his or her life to Christ, a relationship begins, followed by a lifetime of bonding with Jesus.

Jesus is the perfect partner in marriage; He loves to bring out the best in us. “Through the blood of Christ” our past life of sin is forgiven, and day-by-day He gives us His acceptance, His power over sin, His perfect life. Our love for Him in turn produces a desire to live in a way that pleases Him. We know that He’ll be there to pick us up every time we fall.

3. Jesus can save us from eternal death, the penalty for sin.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

—Romans 6:23.

We are spiritual lawbreakers sentenced to die. The penalty for our sins is eternal death. But Jesus can save us from eternal death and give us eternal life. How and why?

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

—Romans 5:8.

Because of His unfailing love, Jesus “died for us.” By accepting death in our place, He provided a pardon for each of us. He experienced the horrors of complete separation from God, so we wouldn't have to. Because He died for us and suffered the full results of sin, God can now forgive and accept sinners without trivializing sin.

4. Jesus can save us from a sinful, unhappy life.

God not only provides forgiveness for our sins, but also healing and restoration. God promises to save us from sin, not in our sins.

“For if a man is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether—the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new.”

—2 Corinthians 5:17 (*The New Testament In Modern English*, J. B. Phillips translation, Copyright © 1958 by J. B. Phillips, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1958).

We can't save ourselves from sin or change our nature on our own any more than a lion can decide to become a lamb (Romans 7:18). Sin is simply stronger than our willpower. But Christ is able to "strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Ephesians 3:16). He works to replace our destructive habits with His healthy qualities: love, peace, joy, kindness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23). Christ lives His life through us. He loves to take on the most hopeless cases.

Harold Hughes had given up hope of ever changing. He'd tried desperately to stop drinking many times. He knew only too well that his battle with the bottle had put his wife and two daughters through ten years of hell. And so he stepped into his bathtub one cold morning and pointed a shotgun muzzle into his mouth. Before pulling the trigger, he decided he'd better explain things to God. That prayer turned into a long, sobbing appeal for help.

And God came through. Harold Hughes made a commitment to Christ and found the spiritual strength to persevere. He quit drinking for good, became a loving, dependable husband and father, and went on to earn a seat in the U.S. Senate.

Tex Watson was so numbed by drugs and decadent living that he didn't know he needed to change. After joining Charles Manson's "family," he participated in the brutal Tate-La Bianca killings that shocked the nation. In prison, his behavior seemed as violent and erratic as it had been on the outside—until he began to read the New Testament.

An encounter with Jesus Christ gave Tex a revelation: "My own horrors were part of a larger horror. I began to see, too, that even for a guilt as gross as mine, a penalty had already been paid. . . . I began to see the power of God's love to overcome death and destruction, His power to heal, not just abstractly but immediately and specifically—for me."

Today reporters are astounded when they visit Tex in prison. The wild-eyed, cold-blooded killer has disappeared. In his place is a warm, sensitive man leading other inmates in Bible study and helping them find peace in Christ. Tex Watson has discovered the greatest transforming power in our world.

5. Jesus can save us from a sinful world.

The next four DISCOVER guides will provide a full explanation of how Jesus will rescue us from our sinful world.

We Are Saved by Taking Three Simple Steps

Step 1. Ask Christ to deal with the sin in your life.

What is our part in getting rid of our sinful life?

“REPENT, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.”
—Acts 3:19.

What leads a person to repent?

“Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that GOD’S KINDNESS LEADS YOU TOWARDS REPENTANCE?”
—Romans 2:4.

“Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because YOUR SORROW LED YOU TO REPENTANCE.”
—2 Corinthians 7:9.

Repentance is simply being sorry for our sins and then turning away from them, making a break with the old habits, practices, and attitudes. It's not sorrow just because we fear punishment, but a response to "God's kindness" that led Jesus to die in our place for our sinfulness. We reject sin because it hurts God.

“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever CONFESSES AND RENOUNCES them finds mercy.”
—Proverbs 28:13.

In addition to acknowledging and getting rid of the old life of sin, what else is necessary for the repentant sinner?

“If he [the wicked man] gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die.”
—Ezekiel 33:15.

Real repentance means not only turning away from sin, but, as far as possible, making past wrongs right.

What is God's part in getting rid of our old life of sin?

“IF WE CONFESS our sins, HE IS FAITHFUL and just AND WILL FORGIVE US our sins and PURIFY US FROM all unrighteousness.”
—1 John 1:9.

“God exalted him [Christ] to his own right hand as Prince and SAVIOR that he might GIVE REPENTANCE and FORGIVENESS OF SINS to Israel.”
—Acts 5:31.

The ability to repent is really a gift to us from God (Acts 5:31). Only He can move us to genuine repentance. And when we do respond, a loving Saviour forgives our sins, blotting them out, throwing them into the depths of the sea, as He says, and cleansing us from sin. There is no sin so terrible that a Saviour who died on the cross for our sins can't pardon. A person who trusts in Jesus needs only to ask Him.

It's a sobering fact that our sins helped drive those nails through Christ's hands and feet. In a real sense we helped crucify the Saviour. But always remember that Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2). He willingly paid the ultimate price for our ultimate redemption. And He is more eager than we can imagine for us to accept His gift of pardon and reconciliation.

Word reached a young man who'd run away from home that his mother was dying. The news filled him with remorse over their broken relationship. Hurrying home, he rushed into the room and threw himself on his mother's bed. In a flood of tears he begged her to forgive him.

She drew him close and whispered, "Son, I would have forgiven you long ago if you'd only asked."

If you have drifted away from God—or have not yet come to know Him—please think about how eager your Heavenly Father is to welcome you home. He's made a spectacle of His forgiving love, displaying it dramatically on a hill called Golgotha. He wants more than anything else for you to accept His offer of pardon and grace. He loves you. He died for you. He is always willing to forgive you.

So respond to His gracious invitation to repent. Confess your sins. Simply believe that God forgives you, and he does. Don't just look to your emotions for reassurance. Trust in the clear promises of Scripture.

Step 2. Receive a new life from Jesus.

Your part in receiving a new life from Jesus is to believe that Jesus has really saved you. Accept without question the fact that He has forgiven and cleansed you, taken away your old life of sin, and given you an entirely new and changed life.

"All who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right [power, authority, privilege] to become children of God."

—John 1:12.

As a child of God, you have "the right" to receive a new life from Jesus. As we have said, you can't achieve it on your own—it's a gift from your heavenly Father!

Jesus gives such an absolute promise in order to remove our insecurities and doubts. But if you do struggle with doubt, remember the man who, in the midst of a wrenching crisis, called out to Jesus: "I do believe; help me to overcome my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Focus whatever trust you can muster on God's promises. It's not how much faith you have that counts, it's simply whether you exercise it or not.

What is God's part in giving us a new life?

"Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'"

—John 3:3.

According to Jesus, a repentant, believing sinner is actually born into a new life. The change is as dramatic as the birth of a baby, and it is a miracle that only God can perform.

What inner change takes place in a person who acquires a new life from Jesus?

“I will give you a NEW HEART and put a NEW SPIRIT in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”
—Ezekiel 36:26.

Jesus transforms our heart—our feelings and behavior—and dwells "in us" (Colossians 1:27). This new life is not just a nice, spiritual idea; it's much more than positive thinking; it's a hard, solid fact. The new birth is a resurrection from spiritual death to an entirely new existence (Ephesians 5:14). Harold Hughes and Tex Watson are just two examples of Christ's ability to give people a wonderful second chance.

How we receive a new life from Christ

- **We believe in Him and receive Him as Saviour and Lord.**
- **We establish a relationship with Him. (A regular time of prayer and Bible reading is vital.)**
- **Christ works through His Spirit to replace our bad habits with His good qualities.**

Step 3. Live for Jesus every day.

The Christian life involves a daily turning away from selfishness, and bonding with Jesus as our loving Friend. We grow in this new life by strengthening our relationship with Jesus. This means spending quality time with Him, building honest and open communication. God has given us five divine aids for spiritual growth: Bible study, prayer, meditation, fellowship with other Christians, and sharing our experience with others. (DISCOVER guides 14 to 20 give practical suggestions on how to live a satisfying Christian life.)

Living in Christ doesn't mean that we become perfect saints. Sometimes we will stumble and sin. But when we do, we can claim Christ's forgiveness, and keep going. We're headed in a certain direction and we know that Christ remains a living presence in our hearts every step of the way (Hebrews 7:25; Jude 24). Jesus provides two things that are essential for healthy growth: a sense of security through His unconditional love, and the motivation to reach higher through His inspiring Word.

The Joy of the Second Chance

Harold Hughes received many honors during his distinguished career as a U.S. Senator, but the one that meant the most to him came shortly after his commitment to Christ.

Harold was studying the Bible alone in his living room one evening when he felt a nudge at his elbow. He looked up. It was his two small daughters, standing quietly in their nightgowns. He stared at them for a moment; they had changed so much, and he had missed so much during his devastating battle with the bottle.

Then Carol, the younger said, “Daddy, we’ve come to kiss you good-night.”

The father's eyes blurred. It had been so long since the children had come for his embrace. Now their beautiful clear eyes held no fear. Daddy had come home at last.

Jesus Christ truly does give people a second chance. He takes on the most hopeless cases and creates new beginnings (Romans 6:23).

The Saviour longs for each one of us to come home at last. Have you accepted Christ's loving invitation? Receiving God's forgiveness and cleansing is as simple and profound as opening your arms for a child's embrace.

If you have not yet trusted in Christ as your personal Saviour, you can do so right now by praying something like this:

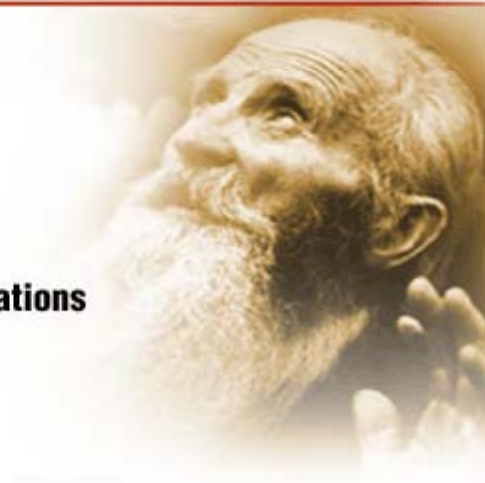
“Father, I am sorry for my old life of sin. Thank you for sending your Son to this world to die in my place. Jesus, please forgive my sins and come into my life and save me. I want a second chance at life—I want to be born again. Even more, I want to establish a day-by-day relationship with You. Thank you for performing this miracle in me. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Make this wonderful discovery: when we do the coming, Jesus does the saving.

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **7** About Your Future

- **An Amazing Bible Prophecy**
- **A Dream Interpreted**
- **Our Day in Bible Prophecy**
- **A Look Into the Future**
- **A Divine Hand Guiding the Nations**
- **The King's Dream and You**



About Your Future

Drs. Patricia and David Mrazek saw a great deal of heart-break in their work. As pediatric specialists at the National Jewish Center for Immunology and Respiratory Medicine, they dealt with many suffering children. But they were struck by the fact that some kids bounced back from disaster while others were crushed by it. Why? Why, for example, does one slum child go to drugs, while another goes to college? Why do some abused children grow up to become abusers themselves, while others become good parents?

The Mrazeks conducted an extensive survey to find answers to these questions. In their study, one overriding trait kept popping up among those kids who survived trauma and went on to build healthy lives. The secret? “A basic life view of optimism and hope.”

Hope made the difference. Hope, more than anything else, helps us beat the odds when they’re stacked against us.

But how do we get it? What can we base it on? The world often seems much too jagged for the bright balloons of hope we try to carry around. Just when we think we’re beginning to soar—something pops them.

We were all feeling proud and hopeful about the space shuttle in 1986; technology seemed to be opening doors into an unlimited future. But then the Challenger blew up right in our living rooms on television.

We were all jubilant about the end of the Cold War in 1989. A new world order of peace and harmony seemed within reach. But then Saddam Hussein began rolling his tanks across the borders, and age-old conflicts in what had been Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union erupted in bloodshed.

Human beings desperately need hope. But hope is hard to find in our world—UNTIL we look at it from the perspective of Bible prophecy. This DISCOVER guide examines a remarkable prophecy that has inspired countless individuals with a vibrant hope. The prophecy in Daniel 2 demonstrates, perhaps more clearly than any other, that God really is in control of history, that He really does hold the future in His hands.

An Amazing Bible Prophecy

About five hundred years before the birth of Christ, God gave the world a startling glimpse into the future through the prophet Daniel. He presented an outline of world history, from Daniel's time to our own day.

This prophecy appears in the second chapter of Daniel. It actually originated in a dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, some 2,500 years ago. The dream deeply troubled this monarch—but he couldn't remember its main elements when he woke up! After all of Babylon's wise men failed to help the king recall his dream or interpret it, a young Hebrew exile named Daniel arrived on the scene, claiming that the God of Heaven could reveal all mysteries.

Standing before the king, Daniel boldly declared:

“You looked, O king, and there before you stood A LARGE STATUE—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.

“The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.

“While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.

“Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But THE ROCK THAT STRUCK THE STATUE became a huge mountain and FILLED THE WHOLE EARTH.”

—Daniel 2:31-35. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

This statue, at first glance, may seem to have little to do with finding hope in contemporary times. Babylonian imagery is a long way removed from the missiles and terrorists haunting our world. But hold on to your seats, because we're about to fast-forward through thousands of years of history—with God operating the remote.



The Prophecy Interpreted

After telling a very impressed Nebuchadnezzar exactly what he'd seen in his vision, the prophet Daniel explained:

“This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.”
—Daniel 2:36.

THE HEAD OF GOLD

What world power did Daniel tell the king the head of gold symbolized?

“You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. YOU ARE THAT HEAD OF GOLD.”
—Verses 37, 38.



Daniel was, in essence, telling the ruler of that world's greatest empire: “Nebuchadnezzar, your dream is a message from God. He represents your kingdom by the statue's golden head.”

The head of gold depicts ancient Babylon quite authentically; historians refer to it as “the golden kingdom of a golden age.” Wealthier and mightier than any empire that preceded it, Babylon proudly dominated her world until 539 B.C.

THE CHEST AND ARMS OF SILVER

From a human perspective—and especially before the proud gaze of Nebuchadnezzar—Babylon looked for all the world like an empire that would last forever. But what does the prophecy say would happen next?

“After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours.”

—Verse 39.



In fulfillment of God’s prediction, Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom crumbled into ruins when Cyrus, the Persian general, overthrew the Babylonian empire in 539 B.C. So the chest and arms of silver represent Medo-Persia, another mighty empire, with the Persians becoming predominant.

THE BELLY AND THIGHS OF BRONZE

What does this part of the great metal image represent?

“Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth.”

—Verse 39.



The belly and thighs of bronze symbolize the kingdom of Greece, which overthrew the Persians at the Battle of Arbela in 331 B.C. Alexander the Great conquered the Medes and the Persians, turning Greece into the world's third great empire. She ruled from 331 to 168 B.C.

THE LEGS OF IRON

What would follow Greece?

“Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom [said the prophet], strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.”

—Verse 40.

After the death of Alexander, his empire weakened and split into rival factions until finally in 168 B.C., at the battle of Pydna, the “Iron Empire” of Rome crushed Greece. God used the iron legs of the great metal man to symbolize this fourth world empire.



Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire when Jesus was born about 2000 years ago (Luke 2:1). Christ and His apostles lived during the period represented by the legs of iron. Gibbon, the 18th century historian, no doubt had Daniel's prophecy in mind when he wrote: “The arms of the [Roman] republic, sometimes vanquished in battle, always victorious in war, advanced with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, and the Ocean; and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings, were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome.”—Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (John D. Morris and Company), vol. 4, p. 89.

Think for a moment about this prediction from a human point of view. How could Daniel, a Hebrew living in the time of Babylon, have any idea of how empires would succeed each other hundreds of years in the future? We have a hard time figuring out what the stock market is going to do next week! And yet Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome followed each other exactly as predicted—like obedient schoolboys in a line.

Is God in control of the future? Can we have hope on the basis of His grand plan? Daniel 2 answers with a resounding, Yes! But there's even more.

THE FEET AND TOES OF IRON MIXED WITH CLAY

Would a fifth world power follow Rome?

“Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so THIS WILL BE A DIVIDED KINGDOM; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle.”

—verses 41, 42.

The prophet predicted, not a fifth world empire, but a division of the iron monarchy of Rome. Rome would fracture into ten kingdoms, as symbolized by the feet and toes of the image.



Did this actually happen? It certainly did. During the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian Era barbaric invaders from the north poured down on the decaying Roman Empire, delivering blow after blow. Finally ten of the tribes gained most of the territory of Western Rome, and ten independent nations established themselves within the boundaries of Western Europe. Thus the toes symbolize the modern nations of Europe today. The prophecy was literally fulfilled, and history again harmonizes with what God foretold. Seven of the ten nations of divided Western Rome remain on the map of Europe today and relate directly back to Daniel’s prophecy.

TEN TOES - TEN MAJOR TRIBES in the Western Roman Empire

Anglo-Saxons (England)

Franks (France)

Alamanni (Germany)

Lombards (Italy)

Ostrogoths (later destroyed)

Visigoths (Spain)

Burgundians (Switzerland)

Vandals (North Africa, later destroyed)

Suevi (Portugal)

Heruli (Disappeared after a few centuries)

Our Day in Bible Prophecy

Does Daniel's prophecy predict that efforts would be made to unite the post-Roman empire nations of Europe under one ruler?

**“And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so THE PEOPLE will be a mixture and WILL NOT REMAIN UNITED, any more than iron mixes with clay.”
—Daniel 2:43.**

Over and over powerful men have tried to unite Europe, but they fall short of the goal every time. “The people will be a mixture and will not remain united” is the verdict of prophecy. It declares that France, England, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Switzerland will never re-shape into one great power and “remain united.”

Living as we do after centuries of nationalism, it's hard to grasp how dramatically Daniel's prophecy identified a major break in history. Up until the collapse of Rome the world had been dominated by empires—starting all the way back with Egypt and Assyria. But after Rome the world carved itself up into nation-states, and that pattern has persisted. Only the mind of God could have foreseen the grand sweep of history so accurately.

Truly, as Jesus said, “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He also declared:

**“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”
—Matthew 24:35.**

Fourteen hundred years of history show that no human power, or combination of powers, has been able to break the force of these words of Bible prophecy: “The people will be a mixture and will not remain united.”

But it's not for a lack of trying. Several men of great military genius have done their best to unite Europe. Napoleon Bonaparte came nearer than any other man to reaching his goal. At the beginning of his military career he boasted, “In five years I shall be master of the world.” He stated his aims very clearly: “The conquest of Russia, Europe, the world.”

Napoleon's troops appeared invincible for some time and swallowed up a great deal of real estate. But while marching to Moscow, the French forces bogged down in an early winter and Russian troops decimated Napoleon's men. Why did he fall short of his goal? Because God has said: “The people will be a mixture and will not remain united.” Napoleon had by far the best army in Europe, but it was no match for the Word of God. As he fled from the battle field of Waterloo, he cried out, “God Almighty is too much for me!”

Kaiser Wilhelm II and Adolf Hitler created the most powerful armed forces of their day. But each failed to unite Europe under their rule. Why? Because God's word was at stake: “The people will be a mixture and will not remain united.”

Dictators who have succeeded in arming an entire people with fanatical zeal haven't been able to revise Daniel's prophecy. The outcome of two world wars confirms this fact: God holds the future in His hands; God is ultimately in control. That's certainly enough to give us hope and peace of mind, to give us confidence in His plan for our lives.

A Look Into the Future

Only one part of Daniel's prophecy remains unfulfilled.

What is the meaning of the stone described in verses 34 and 35 that is to strike the statue on the feet, grind it to powder, and become a great mountain which fills the whole earth?

“IN THE TIME OF THOSE KINGS [the modern nations of Western Europe], THE GOD OF HEAVEN WILL SET UP A KINGDOM that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but IT WILL ITSELF ENDURE FOREVER. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.”

—Daniel 2:44, 45.



“Those kings” could refer only to the kings symbolized by the feet and toes of the statue—the rulers of modern Europe. The conclusion is inescapable. “In the time of those kings” refers to the present day. Our modern world stands on the threshold of the greatest event of all time.

Soon Jesus will descend from heaven to “set up a kingdom,” His kingdom of happiness and peace. The stone that is to strike the statue and break it into pieces will fill the whole earth. Then Christ, the Rock of Ages and the King of kings, will rule the world forever! (The heavenly kingdom of God will be discussed in detail in DISCOVER guide 9.)

This is the climax of Daniel's prophecy; everything leads to this cosmic event. The confidence which this grand prediction inspires, as it takes us with unfailing accuracy through the stages of history, builds to a sure hope in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Everything in the prediction of Daniel 2 has come to pass except the final act—the striking of the statue by the stone. According to God's timetable, we are now approaching the grand climax, Christ's return to our world. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is about to end the long, bloody struggle of human history and establish His eternal empire of love and grace.

God Is Guiding the Nations

When God revealed this prophecy to Daniel, the Hebrew prophet immediately saw the guiding hand of God in the rise and fall of nations (Daniel 2:20-22). God knows the past, and this Bible prophecy clearly shows that He knows the future as well.

Sometimes we may imagine that the Almighty is so occupied with His vast universe that our little planet doesn't rate much attention—much less one individual life on it. But God has gone to great lengths to assure us that He is very much concerned with human history and each individual's history. He's given us a beacon:

“And we have THE WORD OF THE PROPHETS MADE MORE CERTAIN, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to A LIGHT shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and THE MORNING STAR [Jesus] RISES IN YOUR HEARTS.”

—2 Peter 1:19.

God uses Bible prophecy in the dark of our world just like headlights on a car we're driving at night. He shows us where we're going; He shows us what lies ahead. We can be confident that the march of history ultimately goes down His highway.

And He is guiding the lives of every student of the DISCOVER Bible guides. Fulfilled Bible prophecy urges you to invite Jesus, “the morning star,” to rise “in your hearts.” With Him as our Lord we need have no fears.

The King's Dream and You

Yes, the world can be a pretty jagged place. Terrorists can strike at random. Ancient animosities flare up again and again, and spill innocent blood. Tyrants still plot in their strongholds.

But we can acknowledge a fact more important than all the headlines: history is heading toward a face-to-face encounter with Christ. I can prepare right now for history's great climax. The same hand that guided Daniel as he condensed millenniums of future history into a few paragraphs, can guide me as I try to make sense out of my life.

“If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.”

—Psalm 37:23, 24.

If God directs the movements of nations with such precision, surely He can guide each individual's life.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

—Matthew 10:29-31.

God's gift of faith can become the antidote to all our worries and fears. The hope He inspires can serve as an anchor for our souls (Hebrews 6:19).

The sixteenth century scholar Erasmus related an incident during a sea voyage that stayed with him the rest of his life. His sailing vessel ran aground in a storm. As violent waves smashed against the ship and it began to break up, even the sailors panicked. The passengers were near hysteria. Most shouted for help to their patron saint, sang hymns, or pleaded loudly in prayer.

Erasmus noted one passenger, however, who acted very differently. “Of all of us,” Erasmus wrote, “the one who remained most composed was a young woman who was holding a baby whom she was nursing. She was the only one who did not shout, weep, or bargain with heaven. She did nothing but pray quietly to herself while clasping the baby tightly on her lap.”

This prayer, Erasmus realized, was just a continuation of her regular prayer life. She did not ask for any exceptional favors. She seemed to entrust herself to God.

As the ship began to sink, this young mother was placed on a plank, given a spar to use as an oar, and sent out into the waves. She had to hold her baby with one hand and attempt to row with the other. Few thought she would survive the pounding surf.

But her faith and composure stood her in good stead. The woman and her child were the first to reach shore.

Hope in a trustworthy God can make all the difference—even when the world seems to be breaking up around us. We’re not out there on our own. A greater hand is guiding us and holding us up.

If you will come to Christ in full surrender, He will give you a faith that will see you through every storm. Discover the supernatural peace that Jesus promises:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” —John 14:27.

“Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” —Matthew 11:28.

Dear Father in heaven: I do thank You today for Your loving interest in me personally. I thank You for telling us in advance the answers to our questions about the future of our world, and for guiding our world and for guiding our lives. I thank You for the certainty of Bible prophecy. Help me to accept it as Your true Word and to believe it always. And above all, help me to open my heart right now to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. In His name I pray. Amen.



Lesson **8**
**When Jesus
Comes For You**

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- **The Promise**
- **How Will Jesus Come?**
- **What Will Jesus Do
When He Comes Again?**
- **Are You Ready?**



When Jesus Comes For You

After years of mistreatment, Armando Valladares was an emaciated, crippled shadow of his former self. He was serving a 30-year sentence in one of Castro's prisons for the crime of praying in a church on Christmas Day. Prison officials starved, tortured and humiliated the man, but he refused to give up his faith.

Something kept him going: a promise he'd made to a young woman named Martha. They had met and fallen in love while he was in prison. She was deeply attracted to his passionate faith. Shortly after the couple married in a civil ceremony in the prison's bloodstained courtyard, Martha was forced to emigrate to Miami.

Their separation was very painful. But Armando managed to smuggle out a promise to his beloved. On a tiny piece of discarded paper he scribbled his pledge: "I will come to you. . . . The bayonets in the horizon beyond my back will no longer matter."

This prisoner determined that somehow he and Martha would make their vows in a church before God. Someday their union would be complete. "You are always with me," he told her.

Armando's promise kept him going through years of mistreatment that would have destroyed the spirit of most men. And it kept Martha going. She worked tirelessly to bring public attention to her husband's plight. She never gave up hope.

The Promise

There are times when we may be tempted to wonder about the Second Coming of Christ. Will He really descend someday from this blue sky above us for a wonderful reunion? We've been separated for so long. Such a gloriously happy ending to the earth's long, tragic history may appear just too good to be true.

But there's one thing that can keep us going; there's one thing that can keep hope alive in our hearts. And that's simply the promise. The One who longs more than anything else to experience complete union with His people has promised to return. Just before departing from His disciples into heaven, Jesus made this pledge:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME BACK and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

—**John 14:1-3.** *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He assured His followers, "I WILL COME BACK!" He wants us to be with Him, and He promised to return and take all who trust in Him to the special place He has prepared for us.

The second coming of Jesus is a Bible fact. Scripture speaks of His return approximately 2,500 times. Interestingly, you will find more references to Jesus' Second Advent than to His first. The fact that Jesus is coming to the world a second time is as certain as the reality that He lived on this earth two thousand years ago. That's why the apostle Paul could confidently proclaim that, because Christ "gave himself for us" on the cross, we can experience a "blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Long ago God promised that a Messiah would come, a Deliverer who would take on Himself our iniquities and provide pardon for human sin. That promise seemed too good to be true to many in the ancient world who were slogging through their lives. But Jesus did come and die on the cross. The promise came true more gloriously than the Hebrews imagined possible.

His promise to return to earth will come true also. We can rely on the One who loves us, to return and gather up those for whom He has paid an infinite price.

Throughout his imprisonment, Armando Valladares continued to smuggle poems, messages, and drawings to Martha. And finally she managed to publish some of these writings. Their eloquence attracted world attention. Governments began pressuring Castro to release prisoners of conscience. The French president intervened personally, and at last in October of 1982 Armando Valladares was placed on a plane headed for Paris.

He hardly dared believe he was free—even after the plane touched down. But then, after two decades of suffering and longing and waiting, Armando rushed into Martha's arms.

A few months later the happy couple stood in Miami's St. Kieran Church and repeated their vows before God. At last their union was complete. At last the promise was fulfilled: "I will come to you."

Can you imagine what a wonderful reunion it will be when finally we are able to see Christ face-to-face? His glorious appearing will swallow up all our sorrows and frustrations, wipe away all the pain that we've kept hidden in our hearts. Jesus' return will fulfill our deepest longings and most exciting expectations. And we'll embark on an eternity of intimate union with the most wonderful personality in the Universe. Jesus is coming soon! Are you eager to meet Him?

How Will Jesus Come?

1. Will Jesus come in secret?

"See, I [Jesus] have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. FOR AS LIGHTNING that comes from the east IS VISIBLE even in the west, SO WILL BE THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN."

—Matthew 24:25-27.

Lightning flashes out very visibly for great distances. The coming of Jesus will not be some secret or subjective event. So Jesus warns us not to let anyone mislead us with claims that He will return in some hidden manner to a select few.

2. Will Jesus come again as a real person?

"They [Jesus' followers] were looking intently up into the sky as he [Jesus] was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? THIS SAME JESUS, who has been TAKEN from you INTO HEAVEN, WILL COME BACK IN THE SAME

WAY you have seen him go into heaven.”

—Acts 1:10-11.

Jesus will return in person. On the day of His departure from our world the angels assured the disciples that the “same Jesus” taken up into heaven—not someone else—would come back.

The Christ who appears as King of kings will be the same Jesus who healed the sick and opened the eyes of the blind. The same Jesus who spoke gently to the woman taken in adultery. The same Jesus who wiped away mourner’s tears and welcomed children into His lap. The same Jesus who died on Calvary’s cross, rested in the grave, and rose from the dead the third day.

3. Will Jesus come so we can see Him?



The angels promised that “this same Jesus” will return “in the same way” as He went away.

In what way did Jesus leave?

“After he [Jesus] said this, HE WAS TAKEN UP BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”

—Verse 9.

The disciples clearly saw their Master rising from the earth in His glorified human body. Many witnesses saw Him depart. He will “come back in the same way,” in full view, openly.

According to the Apostle John, how many people will witness the return of Jesus?

“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM.”

—Revelation 1:7 (first part).

Both the righteous and the wicked will watch His Second Advent. All who are alive when Jesus comes again will witness His return.

How many did Jesus Himself say would view His return?

“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH will mourn. THEY WILL SEE the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”

—Matthew 24:30.

Every living inhabitant of our globe will witness the Second Advent. More visible than the moon landing broadcast around the world by satellite, more spectacular than an Olympic closing ceremony witnessed by millions, Christ’s return preempts and overwhelms every other event on the planet.

4. In what other way will Jesus broadcast His return?

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with A LOUD COMMAND, with the voice of the archangel and with the TRUMPET CALL OF GOD, and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

—1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Jesus arrives in the clouds “with power and great glory,” like a flash of “lightning” (Matthew 24:30, 27), and with the mighty blast of the trumpet of God.



5. Who will accompany Jesus when He comes?

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.”

—Matthew 25:31.

The appearance of just one angel at Christ’s resurrection prostrated the Roman guards in shock (Matthew 28:2-4). Imagine what it will be like when Jesus returns in all His splendor surrounded by “all the angels.”

6. Can we predict the exact time of Jesus’ return?

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

—Matthew 24:36, 44.

Although everyone will see and hear Jesus’ glorious arrival, many will be unprepared for it. Are you personally ready for Jesus to come?

What Will Jesus Do When He Comes Again?

1. Jesus will bring salvation to all who wait for Him.

“So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but TO BRING SALVATION to those who are waiting for him.”

—Hebrews 9:28.

“And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

—Matthew 24:31.

If you have allowed Jesus to prepare you in heart and life, you will greet Him joyfully as your Saviour.



2. Jesus will awaken the righteous dead who sleep in their graves.

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

—John 5:28, 29.

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST.”

—1 Thessalonians 4:16.

When Jesus returns, He will descend from heaven with a shout that wakes up the dead. That mighty voice is heard around the world and breaks open graves in every cemetery and resurrects millions of people who have accepted Jesus through the ages. What an exhilarating day that will be!

3. Jesus will transform all the righteous at His coming.

The apostle Paul assures us that Jesus returns not only for the righteous dead, but also for the righteous living. He adds:

“After that, we who are still alive and are left WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

—Verse 17.



“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, AT THE LAST TRUMPET. For the trumpet will sound, THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED IMPERISHABLE, and WE WILL BE CHANGED. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

—1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

To prepare us for eternity, Christ changes these sin-sick, and weary bodies of ours into beautiful, immortal bodies. No more arthritis, paralysis, or cancer. Shut down the hospitals and close up the funeral homes. Christ has come!

4. Jesus will take all the righteous people to heaven at His coming.

Jesus Himself made the promise while here on earth, “I will come back and take you to be with me”—in my Father’s house (see John 14:1-3).

The New Testament clearly shows that Jesus will take the saved to heaven at His Second Coming. Peter speaks of the inheritance of the redeemed “kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). Paul tells us of “the hope that is stored up for you in heaven” (Colossians 1:5). We can look forward to exploring the marvels of God’s city, the New Jerusalem, and getting to know our Heavenly Father face-to-face. In a later lesson we will discover how the redeemed, after living in heaven with Jesus for 1000 years, will come back with Christ to spend eternity in a completely recreated, perfect world (Revelation 20-22).

5. Jesus will destroy all the wicked at His return.

According to Jesus, what will happen to the wicked people still alive at His Second Advent?

“Just AS IT WAS in the days of Noah, SO ALSO WILL IT BE in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then THE FLOOD CAME and DESTROYED THEM ALL. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, FIRE AND SULFUR RAINED DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND DESTROYED THEM ALL. IT WILL BE JUST LIKE THIS ON THE DAY THE SON OF MAN IS REVEALED.”

—Luke 17:26-30.

The wicked—those who have persistently rejected all of Jesus’ offers of mercy—actually pass sentence on themselves. As they stare at this inexpressibly glorious face coming toward them from the clouds, a sudden awareness of their sin and indifference proves too painful to bear; they cry to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!” (Revelation 6:16).

The wicked prefer death to standing before Jesus’ all-seeing gaze. They know that the voice now thundering from the sky once tenderly implored them to accept divine grace. Those who lost themselves in the mad rush after money or pleasure or position now realize they’ve neglected the only really worthwhile thing in life.

It is a crushing revelation. After all, not one of them needed to be lost. God Himself finds “no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezekiel 33:11). He is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”

(2 Peter 3:9). Jesus implores us, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). But, incredibly, some turn aside His gracious invitation.

Are You Ready For Jesus to Come?

Jesus has done all He can to help us avoid an eternity without Him. In fact, it cost Him a great deal to guarantee us a glorious future with Him “in my Father’s House.” It cost Him His life!

“But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. . . . CHRIST WAS SACRIFICED ONCE to take away the sins of many people; and HE WILL APPEAR A SECOND TIME, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

—Hebrews 9:26-28.

The Saviour who died on the cross to take away your sins will appear “a second time,” and He will “bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Christ sacrificed Himself in order to offer salvation to each of us. That’s why He is so eager to come again; He wants to claim those who have been redeemed at such a great price. Without the Second Coming, the cross would be a failure. Christ wants to give us an eternally secure home with Him. In order for that to happen someday, we must allow Him to rule in our hearts as Saviour and Lord right now.

On the morning of August 16, 1945 a small boy ran through the Shantung Compound in North China shouting that he’d spotted a plane in the sky. All the able-bodied internees ran outside and looked up at the clouds. These men and women had suffered through years of isolation, deprivation and anxiety, imprisoned by the Japanese as citizens of enemy European nations. For many, only one thing had kept them spiritually alive: the hope that someday the war would end.

An electric current shot through that crowd of 1500 surviving internees as they realized this plane might be coming for THEM. As the hum of the aircraft grew louder, someone yelled, “Look, there’s the AMERICAN FLAG painted on the side!”

And then in an unbelieving daze, voices cried out, “Look, they’re WAVING at us! They know who we are. They’re coming to get us.”

At this point the excitement was more than these ragged, weary, homesick survivors could contain. Pandemonium broke loose. People were running in circles, shouting at the top of their lungs, waving their arms and weeping.

Langdon Gilkey recalled his feelings: “This plane was OUR plane. It was sent here for US, to tell us the war was over...we were again included in the wider world.”

Suddenly the crowd gasped and stared in silence. The underside of the plane suddenly opened and men began floating down in parachutes. This seemed too much to believe. Their rescuers weren’t just coming someday; they were coming today, NOW to be in their midst!

The crowd surged toward the compound gate. No one paused to think of the machine guns pointed down from towers. Years of frustration and loneliness turned into a human avalanche. They broke through the gate and rushed to where the paratroopers were landing.

Soon this flood of humanity turned and poured back into camp—with the soldiers on their shoulders. The camp commander surrendered without a fight. The war was indeed over. Freedom had come. The world was brand new again.

Soon OUR God, OUR Saviour, will descend from the clouds to rescue us. The long horror story of man's cruelty to man will finally cease. There will be jubilation on that day, shouts of joy as we finally understand: "He's coming close; I can see the angels blowing their trumpets." The sound gets louder, the cloud of glory brighter, until we can hardly endure it. But we can't stop looking as we realize: "He sees me. He knows who I am. He's coming to get me."

We'll feel like running and shouting and waving our arms. We'll become a flood of humanity lifted up toward the Son of God. We'll know with indescribable joy: "This is my God. He's coming for me, not someday, but today, right now."

Are you ready to welcome the King in all His glory?

Have you discovered a living hope that can fill your heart? If you have not yet done so, please invite Jesus personally into your life just now. Even as the coming of Jesus to our world will solve the world's problems, so His coming into your heart will help you deal with your present daily problems. The great Problem Solver can deliver you from the guilt and burden of sin and give you eternal life. The coming of Jesus into a life can forever change it as dramatically as the coming of Jesus to our world will transform it. You can depend on Jesus. He will prepare you for His coming and give you the wonderful assurance of a life of eternal happiness.

Dear Heavenly Father: My heart throbs with eager anticipation as I wait for Jesus to come again. Just now, dear Jesus, come into my heart in a deeper sense than ever before. Prepare me to be ready when You come again. Thank you so much! Amen.

Lesson 9

Your Home in Heaven

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- Where Is Heaven?
- Will We Have Real Bodies in Heaven?
- What Will We Do In Heaven?
- Will There Be Evil in Heaven?
- Heaven's Greatest Thrill
- How to Get to Heaven

Your Home In Heaven

When Marco Polo returned to his home town of Venice after many years in the Orient, his friends thought his long journeys had driven him mad. He had such incredible tales to tell.

Marco had travelled to a city full of silver and gold. He'd seen black stones that burned, but no one had ever heard of coal. He'd seen a cloth that refused to catch fire even when thrown into the flames, but no one had ever heard of asbestos. He talked of huge serpents ten paces long with jaws wide enough to swallow a man, nuts the size of a man's head and white as milk inside, and a substance spurting from the ground that actually set lamps alight. But no one had ever seen crocodiles, coconuts, or crude oil. They just laughed at such stories.

Years later, when Marco lay dying, a devout man at his bedside urged him to recant all the tall tales he'd told. But Marco refused: "It's all true—every bit of it. In fact, I have not told half of what I saw."

The Bible writers who give us glimpses of heaven seem to echo Marco Polo's sentiment. In vision they looked on a place so brilliant, so fantastic, that they could describe only a fraction of what they saw. And we face a challenge similar to that of Marco Polo's friends. We must try to imagine the "crocodiles and coconuts" that we've never seen, because the glimpses we do get in the Bible show us that heaven is much more than sitting on clouds and playing on harps.

Where Is Heaven?

Is heaven a real place?

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."
—John 14:1-3, KJV.

Jesus is preparing a very real place for us right now in a very real heaven. He is coming to our world a second time to take us to a custom-made mansion in a heavenly city that is glorious beyond our wildest dreams: the New Jerusalem.

After we've lived there for a thousand years, Christ intends to bring this heavenly home down to planet Earth. (More about this in DISCOVER guide 22). As the New Jerusalem descends, fire will purify the entire world, burning away all pollution and contamination. Our renewed planet then becomes the permanent home of the saved.

How does John, who wrote Revelation, picture these events?

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'"

—Revelation 21:1-3. *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

What was God's original purpose when making our world?

“He who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it TO BE INHABITED.”
—Isaiah 45:18.

When God finished our world, He looked down on a perfect planet teeming with life, and He observed with satisfaction that it was very good (Genesis 1:31). However, as time passed, people became more corrupt, and the earth groaned under the increasing weight of wickedness. This state of degradation and decline has continued until now our world totters on the brink of destruction. It needs the cleansing by fire that God has promised.

After its transformation by fire, who does Jesus promise will occupy the new earth?

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”
—Matthew 5:5.

The Lord never allows His plans to fail. They may be hindered, but in the end He will work out all things according to His great purpose. He will restore His perfect creation to its original beauty. Eden lost is to be Eden restored, and the meek “will inherit the earth.”

Will We Have Real Bodies In Heaven?

The heaven we glimpse in the Bible is much more than a place of ethereal spirit beings. Heaven isn't a land of ghosts; it's inhabited by real people who enjoy a spiritual life, and who have a "glorious body."

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

—Philippians 3:20, 21. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:35-44)

When Jesus appeared to His disciples in His resurrected and glorified body, how did He describe it?

"Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

—Luke 24:39.



Jesus had a real body; He invited Thomas to touch Him (John 20:27). On this occasion Jesus walked into a real house, talked to real people, and ate real food (Luke 24:43). We can be assured that our heavenly bodies will be as solid and real as Christ's resurrected body.

Will we recognize our family and friends in heaven and be able to enjoy close relationships?

"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

—1 Corinthians 13:12.

In heaven we "shall know fully." We'll understand and appreciate one another more deeply than we ever have in this present world.

Jesus' disciples recognized Him in His heavenly body, apparently because of His familiar features (Luke 24:36-43). Mary knew Him at the tomb because of the familiar sound of His voice when He called her by name (John 20:14-16). The two disciples at Emmaus identified Him because of certain familiar gestures. When they noticed the way their guest blessed the food, they recognized Him as the Lord by His manner (Luke 24:13-34).

The redeemed are certain to experience thrilling "face to face" reunions in heaven. Imagine the joy of recognizing your spouse's special smile, or the familiar call of a child you laid to rest long ago, or the endearing gestures of some beloved friend. All the barriers that sin puts up between people will have disappeared. We'll have an eternity to deepen life's most precious bonds and to develop intimate friendships with the most fascinating personalities in the universe.

In the new earth the extraordinary intimacy extends even to the animal kingdom:

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.”

—Isaiah 11:6.

What Will We Do In Heaven?

Besides expanding our relationships in ways we could only dream of before, we'll have plenty of activities to challenge us in heaven. How about designing your own dream house?

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. . . . I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people. . . . They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. . . . My chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands.”

—Isaiah 65:17-22.

Jesus is already preparing personalized homes for us in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (John 14:1-3; Revelation 21). These verses suggest we'll also design and construct other houses—perhaps beautiful country estates, landscaping them with heaven's rich variety of plant life. But this is just the start. Isaiah simply described a busy new earth in terms of the chief occupations of his day: building and planting. Who knows what high-tech adventures await us in God's perfectly advanced civilization? Our present scientific breakthroughs and space odysseys will seem like child's play when we begin exploring in our “Father's house.”

Do you love the beauty of thundering waterfalls, quiet meadows, teeming rain forests, and delicate blossoms?

“The LORD will surely comfort Zion... he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.” —Isaiah 51:3.

God will transform the earth into a pristine Garden of Eden. No more oil spills or smog or drought; the lakes stay crystal clear, the trees majestic, and the mountainsides unscarred.

In the book *Twenty Minutes of Reality* Margaret Montague described her first day outdoors after a serious illness. It happened to be a gray March day marked by the dreags of winter: leafless trees, half-melted piles of snow. But this very ordinary scene was transformed in her eyes. She wrote of beholding “life for the first time in all its loveliness, its unspeakable joy, beauty and importance.” That's the way it will be when we enter that heavenly Garden of Eden. Not only the beauties of the world, but also our capacity to absorb them will be greatly intensified. It will seem like that first day outdoors after a very long illness. And the first “twenty minutes of reality” will extend into a magical eternity. Do you enjoy experiencing new things? Learning? Creating? Some might imagine that life in a perfect environment won't be very stimulating after a while. In time even the greatest vacations get tiring. We can't imagine that there will be any great problems to solve or challenges to overcome in heaven. What will keep us going? But again, it's our imagination, not life in paradise, that's undersized. Note this statement by Christian author Ellen White: “There, immortal minds will contemplate with never failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. . . . Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body. All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed.” —*The Great Controversy* (Nampa, Idaho; Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), page 677.

Will Evil Ever Threaten Heaven Again?

Speaking of the New Jerusalem, the apostle John wrote:

“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”
—Revelation 21:27.

The redeemed won’t have to waste their energies fighting impulses to kill, steal, lie, or rape. They will be changed, making it possible for all petty irritations and selfish thoughts to vanish forever. When Jesus “appears, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). Instead of resisting unhealthy drives, we’ll pursue heavenly graces.

Do you long for a place where there will be no more sickness, suffering, or sorrow?

“There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”
—Revelation 21:4.

“No one living in Zion will say, ‘I am ill.’”
—Isaiah 33:24.

“He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”
—Revelation 21:4.

God is going to completely eliminate sin and its terrible results; they will never appear again. Even the ultimate enemy, death, will vanish. In heaven’s land of eternal youth the redeemed are “immortal” (1 Corinthians 15:53); no inhabitant will ever suffer the ravages of old age.

Heaven not only destroys the results of sin, it also reverses them. Imagine what it will be like for those who’ve struggled with lifelong handicaps:

“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.”
—Isaiah 35:5, 6.

What Is Heaven's Greatest Thrill?

Imagine seeing the Lord of the universe face to face.

“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

—Revelation 21:3.

“You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

—Psalm 16:11.

God Almighty promises to be our companion and tutor. What a joy to sit at His feet! Think what a musician might give to be able to spend a few moments with Beethoven or Mozart. Imagine how much a physicist would treasure the chance to sit down with Albert Einstein, or how much it would mean for a painter to talk with Michelangelo or Rembrandt.

But the redeemed will have an infinitely greater privilege. They will converse with the author of all music, science, and art. They will be on intimate terms with the greatest mind and deepest heart in the universe. And this relationship will overflow into worship.

“‘From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the LORD.”

—Isaiah 66:23.

In the center of the heavenly city stands the great white throne of God. Encircled by an emerald rainbow, His face shines like a blazing sun. Below His feet a glassy sea extends in all directions. On this crystal surface reflecting God's glory, the redeemed gather to pour out their exultant praise.

“And the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”

—Isaiah 35:10.

Early in the days of aviation, three chieftains who'd spent their entire lives in the Sahara were flown to Paris and given a tour. A guide showed them the wonders of the Eiffel Tower and the Palace of Versailles. The tribesmen, however, seemed rather indifferent. They became acquainted with locomotives, automobiles, and telephones; even these curiosities failed to break the composure of these proud warriors.

But then the men travelled to the French Alps and witnessed a spectacle that left them speechless with awe: a waterfall thundering over the rocks. The tribesmen stood transfixed. How many times they'd marched for days to reach some well where they had to dig deep for a few cupfuls of muddy liquid.

The guide tried to lead them to the next scenic spot, but they wouldn't budge. The tribesmen insisted on waiting.

“Waiting for what?”

“The end.”

It was inconceivable that this torrent of life-giving water could just flow on and on forever.

We will experience a similar sense of wonder when we stand on the sea of glass before God’s throne; because that’s when His love and holiness will really overwhelm us. With great effort we managed to scratch out a few minutes of virtue in the self-centered rush of our days on earth. But here is Someone whose goodness never misses a beat. His faithfulness and patience and compassion just keep rolling on, undiluted, uncompromised. And we can only lift our voices in wonder, like the heavenly beings who declare ceaselessly, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8).

You Must Be There!

Jesus wants you to be a part of that thrilling scene on the sea of glass. He doesn't want your mansion in the New Jerusalem to be empty. He longs for that face-to-face meeting. That's why He was willing to rescue you from sin at such great cost:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

—John 3:16.

You must personally take advantage of this gift. You must make a commitment to Christ as Lord and Saviour. You need the pardon that is offered from the cross, because:

“Nothing impure will ever enter it [the New Jerusalem], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

—Revelation 21:27.

Jesus delivers us *from* sin, not *in* sin. We must come to Him through His power in us and be separated from the impure and the unholy. Jesus is our password into His soon-coming kingdom. And that kingdom can have its beginning right now in your heart. When Christ delivers us from sin, He creates a little heaven within. He can help us deal with the worry, anger, lust, fear, and guilt that plague us. The hope of heaven isn't an escape from life's problems; it helps create more heaven on earth. Sociologist Andrew Greeley conducted a poll recently which showed that “those who believe in life after death lead happier lives and trust people more” than those who don't.

Nothing will have a more dramatic impact on your life right now than a trusting relationship with Jesus Christ. Listen to how Peter describes the impact of a living faith:

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are FILLED WITH AN INEXPRESSIBLE AND GLORIOUS JOY, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

—1 Peter 1:8, 9.

Phillips' translation says, “Even now [Jesus] brings you a joy that words cannot express and that has in it a hint of the glories of heaven.” All of this—and heaven too. Have you discovered the kind of abundant life Christ wants you to experience? Please don't turn away from His gracious invitation.

“The [Holy] Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”

—Revelation 22:17.

Jesus is with you now, speaking to your heart as you read these lines. He invites you to “Come!” “Come!” “Come!” He couldn't be more eager, more insistent. If you have not yet done so, this moment above all others is your opportunity to explore His offer. Why not tell Him that you accept His gracious gift and want to spend eternity with Him? Tell Him that you love Him. Thank Him for all He has done for you and all He is still planning for you. If there is something between you and God, ask Him to make you willing to remove it. Today,

while you hear His voice, while your heart is still responsive, give yourself to Him without reserve. Bow your head at this moment and say, *“Jesus, my Lord, I come. I give my all to You. I will be Yours forever. Amen.”*

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **10** How Soon Will Jesus Return?

- **10 Signs That Christ Will Return In Our Day**
- **When Will Jesus Come?**
- **The World's Only Hope**



How Soon Will Jesus Return?

In 1978 a miracle drug was discovered which doubled the human life span.

In 1980 the internal combustion engine was outlawed in all major U.S. cities.

In 1981 Montana became America's first penal state. All criminals given prison sentences were sent there.

Between February and May of 1983 all the women in St. Louis lost their hair.

Did you miss any of these remarkable events? Probably so. Because none of these things ever happened. But all were confidently predicted by well-known psychics.

Most of us have an almost instinctive urge to peek into the future. We want to know what lies beyond the horizon. But accurate predictions remain terribly elusive. We have a difficult enough time forecasting tomorrow's weather!

There is Someone, however, whose prophecies have proven remarkably accurate. Jesus Christ, through His Word, can take us into the future; He's a reliable guide. In this lesson we're going to look at what He had to say about His Second Coming. After all, who could know more about the end of the world than the One who created it in the beginning?

Signs That Christ Will Return in Our Day

After Jesus assured His disciples that He would come back to our world a second time (John 14:1-3), what question did they ask Him?

“Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be THE SIGN OF YOUR COMING and of the end of the age?’”

—**Matthew 24:3.** (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

Jesus answered clearly and positively. In chapter 24 of Matthew and chapter 21 of Luke He personally gave several “signs,” or evidences, by which we can know when His coming is near. Other Bible prophecies help fill out the picture, detailing world conditions just before Christ’s return. As we’ll see, these prophecies are being fulfilled before our very eyes; they indicate that Christ’s coming back to earth is near at hand.

Let’s look at ten signposts of Bible prophecy along the highway to heaven, and examine the questions that a modern-day traveler might ask as he reads them.

Signpost 1—Anguish! Terror! Perplexity!

How would you describe an age that has all the technology to expand human happiness, and yet is plagued by disintegrating families and violent neighborhoods? Over nineteen hundred years ago Jesus gave a prophetic description of contemporary life that sounds as if it could have been taken from the evening news:

“There will be SIGNS in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, NATIONS WILL BE IN ANGUISH AND PERPLEXITY at the roaring and tossing of the sea. MEN WILL FAINT FROM TERROR, APPREHENSIVE OF WHAT IS COMING ON THE WORLD, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. AT THAT TIME THEY WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

—**Luke 21:25-28.**

No more accurate description of today’s world, could be penned than: “Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.” A generation exists today which has grown up entirely in the shadow of stockpiled weapons capable of destroying the entire planet. Today’s apprehensions make yesterday’s seem pretty small: “What if some terrorist gets ahold of a nuclear warhead?”

But Jesus gives us a basis for hope in a calamitous age. The current crisis of global insecurity—“anguish and perplexity”—only reinforces the truth that Christ’s coming really is “drawing near.”

People today often moan in frustration, “Look what the world has come to!” But the student of Bible prophecy can exclaim with hopeful voice, “Look WHO is coming to our world.”

Signpost 2—World Calamities.

How do natural disasters fit into last day-events?

“There will be great EARTHQUAKES, FAMINES and PESTILENCES in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. When you see these things happening, you know that THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR.”

—Luke 21:11, 31.

Skeptics might say, “So what? There have always been famines and earthquakes.” But think about famines for a moment. Isn’t it rather amazing that a world which can send men to the moon, CANNOT feed all its people. How is it that those images of starving kids with distended bellies persist on the news, when many countries grow more food than they know what to do with?

Jesus knew that famines would persist, that selfish human nature, corrupt governments, and armed conflicts would persist—and grow worse toward the end of time. These factors are what have made recent famines so devastating.

But what about earthquakes? Check these statistics on major earthquakes. According to the World Almanac of 1999, century after century of the Christian era there has been a striking increase in major earthquakes. In the 18th century there were at least 6 major earthquakes, in the 19th century at least 7 major earthquakes, and more than 100 major earthquakes in the 20th century. So the evidence grows more dramatic as we get nearer to our present day. These figures confirm Jesus’ prophecy.

And the world hasn’t stopped shaking: Armenia, India, Mexico, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Turkey, Greece, Taiwan . . . and the list goes on and on. These phenomena are reaching a crescendo—“the kingdom of God is near!”

How many earthquakes will there be here and now in our 21st century, and where will they be? Will our 21st century bring hundreds more earthquakes, or the coming of the King of kings?

Signpost 3—Accumulating Wealth.

What is the meaning of the fact that wealth seems to slip into the hands of fewer and fewer while more and more fall into poverty?

“You have hoarded wealth in the last days.”

—James 5:3.

Despite all our economic insights, despite gross national products in the West that boggle the mind, the rich keep getting richer and the poor poorer. In the 90’s we witnessed a veritable orgy of junk bond dealing and leveraged buyouts as individuals bought and sold corporations like used cars. The result: an incredible mass of “hoarded wealth” for a few, plant closings and layoffs for many. The multi-million dollar fortunes made as a result of a few transactions are another signpost that show us that “the Lord’s coming is near” (verse 8), that the world is rushing toward the Second Coming of Christ.

Signpost 4—Civil Unrest.

Why have discontent and unrest among employees risen so dramatically in spite of technological advance and accumulated wealth?

“Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. THE CRIES OF THE HARVESTERS [WORKERS] have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. Be patient and stand firm, because THE LORD’S COMING IS NEAR.”

—James 5:4, 8.

After predicting an unparalleled piling up of wealth in our day, James foresaw civil unrest arising from discontented workers. The tension between the “haves” and the “have-not’s” continues to increase. An ominous streak of anarchy lies just below the surface in the great cities of the world. James indicates that such attitudes are another sign that “the Lord’s coming is near.”

Signpost 5—Moral Decay.

Why does the moral fiber of society seem to be shredding?

“But mark this: There will be TERRIBLE TIMES IN THE LAST DAYS. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. EVIL MEN AND IMPOSTORS WILL GO FROM BAD TO WORSE, deceiving and being deceived.”

—2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13.

Could anyone think of a more accurate description of our world? Point a camera in any direction these days and you’ll catch a picture of arrogant materialism. You’ll capture a shocking epidemic of child abuse and molestation. You’ll get countless scenes of youth out of control, kids in their early teens killing and maiming at random. You’ll snap shot after shot showing lovers of pleasure who try to make the cult of self-indulgence seem “healthy and normal.” Our obsession with uninhibited freedom has indeed brought “terrible times in the last days.” All these things form a gallery of pictures loudly proclaiming that Jesus’ coming is very near.

Signpost 6—Spread of the Occult.

How is it that in our secular age we’ve seen an explosion of interest in the occult?

“The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders.”

—2 Thessalonians 2:9.

“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.”

—Matthew 24:24.

These passages predict that toward the time of the end, the work of the antichrist will feature all kinds of miracles and signs, a counterfeit manifestation of the supernatural. This picture flatly contradicts what almost all observers have been predicting for hundreds of years, that reason would triumph over superstition. The scientific method, we were told, would win hands-down over mere religious truth. Science would make the supernatural incredible, if not obsolete.

But what have we discovered as we near the twenty-first century? People can cling to their VCRs and their Tarot cards at the same time. Educated, scientific, progressive human beings are as superstitious as ever.

The occult hasn't shriveled away, it's advertising in broad daylight. Paganism is simply an alternative lifestyle. Witches and warlocks appear on talk shows. New Agers are everywhere, selling magical crystals and channeling departed spirits. Counterfeit signs and wonders are booming. All this makes it even clearer that history is moving toward a climax, that just as Jesus predicted, we are living in the time of "the coming of the Son of Man" (verse 27).

Signpost 7—An Awakened World.

What is the meaning of the awakening to world-consciousness of Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the nations of the Far East?

"LET THE NATIONS BE ROUSED; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe . . . so great is their wickedness! Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR in the valley of decision."

—Joel 3:12-14.

Today Asia and Africa have aroused from sleep; they feel their strength and are looking for their place in the sun, for a piece of a global economy. Eastern Europe is seething. The republics of the former Soviet Union jostle for position. Middle Eastern countries empowered by oil revenues are dramatically enlarging their spheres of influence. As one ethnic or religious group after another reaches for sovereignty, maps are out-of-date almost as soon as they're printed. We are witnessing perhaps the most widespread awakening of individual nations in all of recorded history, "for the day of the Lord is near."

Signpost 8—Peace Plans and War Preparations.

Why do we vacillate between talking about peace and engaging in war? Jesus said of the last days just before His coming:

"You will hear of WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

—Matthew 24:6, 7.

Before the twentieth century, war had never been waged on a truly worldwide scale. But in this century nearly every significant nation on earth joined in two great global conflicts. And since World War II, we've lived with the knowledge that one push of a button could turn our world into a heap of rubble. No wonder the Bible speaks of God "destroying those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).

We live in a strange world. Everyone agrees that we should give peace a chance. We talk peace; we boast of international organizations dedicated to peace; yet everyone keeps falling into armed conflicts. Pent up hostilities, some centuries old, flare into open conflict. Border disputes turn into artillery exchanges. Terrorist

raids result in “surgical air strikes,” and “surgical air strikes” bring on more terrorist raids. The prophets Micah and Joel predicted that at the very time the nations talk about their desire for peace (Micah 4:1-3), distrust for their neighbors compels them to prepare for war (Joel 3:9-13).

Long ago the Bible pictured our present peace-war dilemma, and declared that permanent peace will reign on earth only when Jesus comes.

Signpost 9—Modern Progress.

Why, after centuries of human history, is mankind suddenly now making such scientific and technological progress? Why has transportation and communication brought the world so close together?

IN “THE TIME OF THE END, many will go here and there to increase knowledge.”
—Daniel 12:4.

The eight preceding signs that Christ’s Second Coming is near began to be fulfilled early in the Christian era. These signs have intensified, multiplied, and crescendoed to a climax in our day. Daniel’s prediction is unique in that it refers exclusively to our day, to “the time of the end.”

Daniel here indicates that knowledge of his prophecies would increase in “the time of the end.” But the language used in this prediction also seems to point straight to our computerized information age. Knowledge of all kinds has increased at lightning speed these past few years. One commentator has stated: “There have been more changes in the past fifty years than in the previous two thousand. We do thousands of things that H.G. Wells and Jules Verne never dreamed of in their most visionary moments.”

“MANY WILL GO HERE AND THERE to increase knowledge.” Before 1850, people moved around by horse and buggy, pretty much as they had from the beginning of time. Now we break the sound barrier and span the globe in everything from Concorde airplanes to space shuttles.

Increased travel and the recent flood of inventions suggests a fulfillment of Daniel 12:4 and gives further evidence that we’re living in “the time of the end.”

Signpost 10—Gospel to All the World.

Jesus predicted that just before His coming the gospel would reach the whole world:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”
—Matthew 24:14.

We’ve had great Christian missionary movements in history. But what has happened in the last few years is unprecedented. For decades almost half the globe was locked behind an iron curtain, shut away from the good news. Despotic, atheistic regimes suppressed Christian witness.

But then in 1989 almost overnight it seemed that Eastern Europe slipped from the iron grip of communism. Dictators fled their countries. Secret police forces went into hiding. The Berlin Wall came crashing down. And then, incredibly, the mighty Soviet Empire fell apart and stumbled toward democracy. Suddenly roughly half the planet was opening its arms to the gospel.

We’ve seen a spiritual revolution in the former Soviet Union as the gospel rushed in to fill an enormous spiritual vacuum. The same is true of other parts of the world. For centuries Muslims have closed their minds to

the gospel of Christ. Now many Muslims are turning to Christ and are welcoming the hope of His Second Coming.

The gospel is truly going “to the whole world” as never before. With present technology it’s possible right now to transmit a Christian message simultaneously to almost every person in every nation. Simultaneous translation techniques enable individuals to understand the broadcast in their own language. We are living in the very day Jesus spoke of when He declared: “The gospel will be preached in the whole world” and then “the end will come.”

How Soon Will Jesus Come?

Our generation has seen and is seeing these ten great signposts of prophecy fulfilled before our very eyes.

After describing the events that were to characterize the time just preceding His Second Coming, Jesus concludes His remarks by saying,

“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”

—Matthew 24:34.

The conclusion is obvious—the generation portrayed by these signposts of prophecy will see Jesus return to earth a second time. It won’t be long until He’ll sweep away sin and suffering. Jesus will come and establish His everlasting kingdom.

What did Jesus say about the exact time of His coming?

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

— Matthew 24:36.

What important caution has Christ given to us?

“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

—Matthew 24:44.

Jesus, the World's Only Hope

People today are aware that our world is heading toward a crisis. Some desperately look for a way to prevent it. But all our technological advances, economic theories, and international organizations are still overwhelmed by global problems. Voices of reason and goodwill are drowned by the fierce shouts of ethnic factions and sectarian zealots. Above all this clamor, however, Jesus calmly and boldly declares, “I am the way!” (John 14:6), and He promises, “I will come back!” (verse 3).

Christ is the last, best hope for our world because only He can deal with the very thing that is destroying it—sin. Jesus died on Calvary to make possible the defeat of evil and deliverance for all who respond to His offer of salvation.

“He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” —1 John 3:8.

Our Saviour created a way out of our crumbling world by sacrificing His own flesh and blood. And the same Jesus, who will someday cure all the world’s ills by destroying sin, offers right now to erase the guilt of sin from your own life. You don’t have to wait for the Second Coming to find release from guilt, and from anxiety and destructive behavior. Jesus is quite willing to give you His kind of peace this very moment.

While a young woman named Jean was attending a religious meeting, she felt strangely moved by the gospel presentation. As she heard the story of a soon-coming Saviour unfold, all the pieces began to fit into place. This made sense. Jean decided that she’d been looking for love, happiness, and peace in all the wrong places. Jesus had to be the answer.

The next day when the evangelist and his associate went to see her, Jean poured out the story of a bitter and broken life. She’d sunk to the bottom as an alcoholic, and was supporting herself through prostitution. After describing her problems, she sobbed out, “You were really speaking to me last night.” But the voice that had reached her heart was the voice of God. And He was speaking tenderly. Jean decided to lay it all on the line. She invited Christ to come into her heart as Saviour and Lord, and fastened onto the hope of His soon return.

In the weeks that followed, Jean began to notice that her many fears and insecurities, which she’d always tried to drown in drink, now found release as she spent time communicating with Jesus. He began to deliver her from the compulsions that had been wrecking her life.

Jean had done a lot of things she wasn’t proud of. But Christ’s grace and forgiveness proved stronger than her shame. The experience of the thief on the cross meant a lot to her. In his last, desperate hours he turned to the Innocent Sufferer beside him and asked, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Jesus immediately answered by promising the thief a place with him in paradise (verse 43). The same Jesus who graciously offered forgiveness to Jean and to that dying thief, now offers you salvation, complete pardon, and peace of mind. Discover it for yourself today.

You too can pray with the dying thief: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus will answer, “I will come back, and you will be with Me in paradise.”

Dear Father in heaven: Thank You for the hope that Jesus will come again very soon. In times like these, when that coming is so near, the great longing of my heart is to live for You. I need Your power

in my daily life. Help me every day to grow more and more like Jesus as I fellowship with You in Bible study and prayer. Help me to live my faith so that others will want to know Christ. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Lesson **11**

DISCOVER *online* Mysterious Power In My Life

- **Christ's Representative in the World**
 - **Who Is the Holy Spirit?**
 - **The Activities of the Holy Spirit**
 - **The Gifts of the Spirit**
 - **The Spirit-Filled Life**
- ...and more!**



Mysterious Power In My Life

In 1929 Frank Morris boarded a ship bound for Switzerland. He'd looked forward to this voyage for some time. But it turned into a humiliating experience. A steward put in charge of his care locked Frank in his cabin each night. After a quick breakfast Frank could exercise a bit, but felt foolish being led around the deck, like an animal on a leash. Then the steward deposited Frank in a steamer chair. Whenever he met a friendly passenger who invited him for a stroll, the steward objected, saying he had to keep an eye on him.

Frank was an adult, with the normal curiosities and desires of an adult. But he was also blind. The steward assumed he couldn't take care of himself. Frank was treated like an American Express parcel that had to be lugged around.

But in Switzerland Frank's life dramatically changed. While there he learned about dogs which had been especially trained to guide the blind. Bringing a German shepherd named Buddy back to the United States, Frank started an organization called Seeing Eye.

Now, with Buddy at his side, Frank could go anywhere, anytime, with anyone. He felt free at last. During one demonstration to a group of reporters at a busy cross street in New York City, Buddy guided his master expertly from one lane to the other while cars whizzed past. Because he trusted Buddy implicitly, Frank made it across fine. The sighted reporters had a much more difficult time; one actually took a cab to get to the other side.

In the next few pages we're going to learn about the Holy Spirit, a Guide who wants us to place our lives in His hands. All of us are handicapped by the same human nature, the same blindness to what's really most important. Life rushes by us at such a frantic pace that we often find ourselves just coping instead of going anywhere. Still, we're hesitant to trust our lives completely to this Guide. We may still want to cross the street on our own. But the discovery that awaits each of us is this: we'll find real freedom and power by depending on the Holy Spirit to guide us through life.

Christ's Representative In the World

When Christ was about to ascend into heaven, His disciples grew apprehensive at the thought of their Master's parting. So Jesus promised them a priceless gift, a personal Counselor and Guide:

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, THE COUNSELOR will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. . . . When He, THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, comes, HE WILL GUIDE YOU into all truth. . . . HE WILL BRING GLORY TO ME by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”

—John 16:7,13,14. *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

In the divine plan, Jesus needed to return to heaven as our representative before God's throne and “appear for us in God's presence” (Hebrews 9:24). But believers can, in a sense, have it both ways. While our crucified Lord represents us in heaven, we also have right here on earth, the Holy Spirit, Jesus' direct representative from heaven.

While He ministered within the confines of a human body, Christ couldn't be present everywhere. But the Holy Spirit has no such limitations; He can serve as a personal life-guide to countless individuals in many places at the same time. Christ meets our needs through the Holy Spirit.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Most of us can relate to God the Father if we imagine the most caring, nurturing parent we have ever known. And we can picture Jesus the Son, because He lived among us as a person. But the Holy Spirit is harder to picture and relate to. We have no easy human comparisons. The Bible, however, does give us specific information about Him:

A Personality. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as a person, a member of the Godhead, along with God the Father and God the Son:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER and of the SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.”

—Matthew 28:19.

The Bible tells us that the Spirit has personal characteristics: a mind (Romans 8:27); wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:10); feelings of love toward us (Romans 15:30); feelings of grief when we sin (Ephesians 4:30); the ability to teach us (Nehemiah 9:20); and power to guide us (Acts 16:6, 7).

Involvement in Creation. The Holy Spirit participated in the forming of our world with the Father and the Son.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. . . . And the SPIRIT OF GOD moved upon the face of the waters.”

—Genesis 1:1, 2, KJV.

The Activities of the Holy Spirit

1. Changing the human heart. Scripture repeatedly describes the work of the Holy Spirit in very personal terms; it is evident that He knows individuals intimately and influences them at the deepest level. In His encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in changing the human heart:

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is BORN OF water and THE SPIRIT.’”

—John 3:5.

The Spirit of God once moved on the waters at creation; He now moves in us to bring about our re-creation. To be “born of the Spirit” means that the Spirit gives us a new beginning. It's more than a matter of modifying our behavior a bit. The Spirit changes us from the inside out, fulfilling the promise: “I will give you a new heart” (Ezekiel 36:26).

2. Making us aware of wrongdoing and giving us a desire for holiness. What enables people to acknowledge their sins and take responsibility for them?

“When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, HE WILL CONVICT the world of guilt in regard to SIN and RIGHTEOUSNESS and judgment.”

—John 16:8.

If it weren't for the convicting power of the Spirit, we could easily drift along oblivious to the destructive consequences of our behavior. In a world full of dysfunctional individuals it's sometimes hard to know what “normal” and “healthy” really are. But the Spirit makes us more deeply aware of the truly “good life” that God designed for His children.

When you hear the dramatic story of a drug addict finding deliverance in Christ, or of someone turning from an immoral lifestyle to God and becoming a faithful spouse and nurturing parent, remember that every step toward wholeness came as a result of the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

3. Guiding us in our Christian life. The Holy Spirit sometimes makes His most important moves through quiet whispers:

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”

—Isaiah 30:21.

God speaks to us directly through the “still small voice” of the Spirit, setting us back on course when we take a detour and fixing our sights on the ultimate goal. Jesus promised His disciples:

“When he, THE SPIRIT of truth, comes, he will GUIDE you into all truth.”

—John 16:13.

The Spirit is capable of communicating the most profound secrets of the universe. The same Spirit who guided the disciples guides us “into all truth.” He opens our eyes to the spiritual values we so easily ignore. Through satellite transmission, our TVs regularly bring images and faces from a continent away into our living room. The Holy Spirit functions a little like God's satellite, bringing the presence of Christ from heaven to earth, making Him close when we need Him most. That's why Jesus could promise: I will be “with you and will be in you” (John 14:17).

4. Aiding our prayer life. The Holy Spirit also assists in messages sent from earth to heaven:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, BUT THE SPIRIT HIMSELF INTERCEDES FOR US with groans that words cannot express . . . in accordance with God's will.”

—Romans 8:26, 27.

The Spirit Himself is praying as we pray! When we are struggling to find the words, He is pleading eloquently. When we are so discouraged we can only groan toward God, the Spirit amplifies our faint cry for help into a powerful prayer for intercession before the very throne of God.

5. Developing Christian qualities and character. The Spirit makes spiritually barren individuals as fertile as a tree bearing all kinds of fruit:

“BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. . . . Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature, its passions and desires.”

—Galatians 5:22-24.

We can define healthy religion by these fruits. It's not about rituals; it's about qualities: genuine love, deep joy, abiding peace. The fruit of the Spirit demonstrates that we are grafted into the true vine, Jesus.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

—John 15:5.

Jesus Christ can actually live His abundant life through us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

6. Preparing us as witnesses. Jesus promises those who've made a commitment to Him as Lord and Saviour:

“YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER when the HOLY SPIRIT comes on you; and you will be MY WITNESSES . . . to the ends of the earth.”

—Acts 1:8.

We may not have all the answers; we may not know all the right Bible texts, but the Spirit can give us a story to tell that moves hearts and minds. All who are willing can be made witnesses by the Spirit. The apostles had trouble communicating even with each other before Pentecost. But after the Spirit came they proclaimed Christ with such power that they “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6, KJV).

The Gifts of the Spirit

Scripture makes a distinction between God's gift of the Holy Spirit to every believer for victorious Christian living, and the various gifts of the Spirit provided to believers for effective ministry in different ways.

“When he [Christ] ascended on high, he led captives in his train and GAVE GIFTS to men.’ It was he who gave SOME to be APOSTLES, some to be PROPHETS, some to be EVANGELISTS, and some to be PASTORS and TEACHERS, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

—Ephesians 4:8, 11-13.

Paul makes clear that all believers do not receive all the gifts. Different Christians receive different gifts, and some may be gifted in more obvious ways than others as the Spirit “gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11). But the Spirit equips each believer for his or her special role in God’s plan.

Paul’s other list of spiritual gifts is found in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. This list of gifts includes wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues [margin; languages], and the interpretation of languages (verses 8-10). Some in the Corinthian church were teaching that the gift of tongues or languages was the most important gift of all. Factions sprang up in the church as a result. The apostle devoted chapter 12 to making it clear that the Spirit seeks to bring unity and balance to the church through His gifts and that one manifestation of the Spirit should never exclude or dominate the others.

Which is more important—the gifts of the Spirit, or the fruit of the Spirit? Let Paul answer:

“Eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.”
—1 Corinthians 12:31.

The love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) that follows this verse emphasizes that “the most excellent way” is the way of love. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Our concern should be to seek the fruit of the Spirit and then let the Spirit distribute His gifts to us as “he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11). The church will never be complete without the gifts of the Spirit, but neither will it be strengthened by artificial imitations of what the Spirit produces. God knows when and where to provide the gifts that will best bless His people and His church.

“Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

—Ephesians 4:13.

The Fullness of the Spirit at Pentecost

On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out in unlimited measure, fulfilling Jesus' earlier promise:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth.”

—Acts 1:8.

The Spirit assumed the form of a dove at Christ's baptism. At Pentecost He appeared as “tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:3). On that occasion the Spirit enabled the apostles to communicate the gospel clearly in the languages of people “from many nations” (verses 4-6).

Some Bible students compare the coming of the Spirit to the falling of the early autumn and the late spring rains of Palestine.

“Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.”

—Joel 2:23.

Early autumn in Palestine brings gentle rains which saturate the ground and water the seeds, causing new shoots to sprout from the soil. The Spirit falling at Pentecost was like the early rain of autumn. Pentecost watered the Word sown by Jesus during His ministry and the disciples caused many new buds of faith to spring up as they began to carry the gospel to all the world. This “early rain” of the Spirit provided vital nourishment for the Christian church in its infancy, watering a great many seeds (Joel 2:23, NIV & KJV).

The Latter Rain of the Spirit

Centuries have now passed and the story of salvation has spread over a large part of the earth. It's now time for the “spring,” or “latter rains,” to ripen the grain, making it ready to harvest.

Bible prophecy tells of a day coming when the Spirit of God will be poured out like a shower on the church:

“And afterward, I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT ON ALL PEOPLE. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit IN THOSE DAYS.”

—Joel 2:28, 29.

As history moves to a climax and the final signs appear before Christ's Second Coming, God will prepare every sincere believer for heaven through a great outpouring of His Spirit. Are you now experiencing the former rain that is preparing the church for the latter rain of the Spirit? Are you living a Spirit-filled life today? As you are empowered by the Spirit, will you let God use you to communicate the news of His incredible love and soon return?

Conditions for Receiving the Holy Spirit

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit moved those who heard the gospel appeal to cry out, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

“Peter replied, ‘REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’”

—Acts 2:38.

The apostle Peter emphasized repentance—turning away from a sinful way of life and turning to Christ—as a condition for receiving the gift of the Spirit.

The Spirit is already working in people to lead them to that point: He makes us aware of God's goodness and gives us the desire to turn from wrongdoing (Romans 2:4). He's also involved in the work of conversion (Acts 3:19). What Peter pointed out was that to have the Spirit poured out on us as a gift, to be filled with the Spirit, we must first repent and commit our lives to Christ as is symbolized by baptism.

Jesus stated the same truth in a slightly different way. He emphasized a willingness to follow and obey as a condition for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit:

“IF YOU LOVE ME, YOU WILL OBEY WHAT I COMMAND. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH.”

—John 14:15-17.

The person who claims the gift of the Holy Spirit but continues to live a sinful life is only fooling himself. There is a “wicked spirit” which imitates some of the Spirit's manifestations, leading some to conclude that this “gift of God” condones their immoral behavior.

The Spirit-Filled Life

The Holy Spirit makes the life of a Christian fulfilling and beautiful because a Spirit-filled existence fulfills Christ's ideal for us:

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

—John 10:10.

Before leaving the world, Jesus instructed His followers,

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the GIFT my Father promised, . . . For John BAPTIZED WITH WATER, but in a few days you will be BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.”

—Acts 1:4, 5.

The word baptize means to immerse. Christians are to confess their faith in Christ by being immersed in the waters of baptism. They are also to be immersed, or baptized, in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus informed Nicodemus:

“No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of [both] WATER and THE SPIRIT.”

—John 3:5.

Over and over Scripture indicates that the Christian is to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 4:31; 6:3, 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 13:52; 19:6). While describing the Spirit-filled Christian life, Paul offered this prayer for every believer:

“I pray that out of his glorious riches HE MAY STRENGTHEN YOU WITH POWER THROUGH HIS SPIRIT IN YOUR INNER BEING, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. . . . Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, ACCORDING TO HIS POWER THAT IS AT WORK WITHIN US.”

—Ephesians 3:16, 17, 20.

The Spirit-filled life is the way to genuine freedom. Like Frank Morris with his faithful guide dog Buddy, we can, with the Holy Spirit guide inside us, do immeasurably more than we could before. We discover new desires and new abilities. We are enabled to move forward confidently instead of just trying to cope with life's problems.

This Spirit-filled experience is renewed each day through prayer and Bible study. These are the principal tools the Spirit uses to help us grow [as we'll see in guides 14 and 15]. Prayer keeps us in close contact with Christ and the Word of God keeps us focused on His resources. This is how we begin to replace bad habits and attitudes with healthy qualities.

The Spirit-filled life is a gift for every believer. We can all be successful in the Christian life, moving forward at whatever pace God enables us, but moving forward. Romans 8 gives an exciting description of the Spirit-filled life. Read it when you can, and note how many times Paul points to the “Spirit” as the power behind the Christian life.

Have you made the wonderful discovery of the Spirit-filled life? Are you conscious of the presence of the Spirit in your life? Are you experiencing His life-giving power? Make sure there is no barrier between you and Christ that might prevent Him from pouring out His priceless gift. Open up your life to the greatest power in the universe.

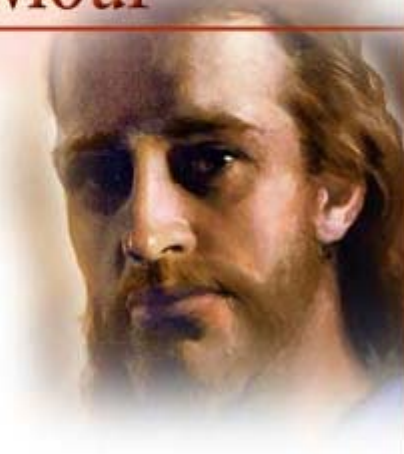
Dear Father: Giver of every good and perfect gift, I praise You today for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. I ask Jesus to come and live in me and fill me with the Holy Spirit. Drive out my old habits, energize me with Your divine qualities. Make mine today a God-guided, Christ-controlled, Spirit-empowered life. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **12**
An Ever-Present Saviour

- **Unlimited Access to Jesus**
- **The Gospel in the Old Testament**
- **Jesus Ministry for Us
Revealed In the Sanctuary**
- **Why the Blood?**

...and more!





An Ever-Present Saviour

When a Scottish lad named Peter Marshall got lost in a moor near Bamburgh on an inky black night, God called him by name: “Peter!” When the heavenly voice called out again, Peter stopped in his tracks, looked down, and discovered he was a step away from plunging into an abandoned limestone quarry.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could each hear God calling us by name? Wouldn’t it be great if He were that close a companion—if we could actually sit down in our living room and have a long chat about our struggles and dreams?

Unlimited Access to Jesus

Believe it or not, through His Holy Spirit, Jesus is more accessible to us now than if He actually lived here as a visible person (John 14:16-20). Having Christ in the flesh in our town would be wonderful of course, but think of the enormous crowds pressing for a closer look, think of the demands on His time. One individual would do well to get a few minutes of direct conversation in a lifetime. Christ, however, wishes to cultivate personal relationships with every one of us; that’s one reason He left this earth for a special ministry in heaven.

Jesus was near to Peter Marshall on the edge of that stone quarry. He guided him to become pastor of a large church in downtown Washington, D.C. and chaplain of the United States Senate. And, because Jesus is not limited to one place like He was when here on earth, He is now near to guide the life of every willing person.

What encouraging promise did Jesus give His followers just before He ascended?

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. . . . And surely I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, to the very end of the age.”

—**Matthew 28:18, 20.** *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

What is Christ doing in heaven that makes it possible for Him to be “with you always”?

“Therefore, since WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST who has gone through the heavens, JESUS THE SON OF GOD, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

—**Hebrews 4:14-16.**

Note the assurances of having Jesus as our personal representative in heaven: “Tempted in every way, just as we are.” “Sympathize with our weaknesses.” “Help us in our time of need.” Jesus as our High Priest can usher us into the very presence of God. No wonder we’re urged to “approach the throne of grace with confidence.”

What place does Jesus occupy in heaven?

“But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.”

—Hebrews 10:12.

The living Christ—someone who understands—is our personal representative on the throne “at the right hand of God.”

How did the life of Jesus prepare Him to be our priest?

“For this reason he had to be made like his BROTHERS in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, HE IS ABLE TO HELP those who are being tempted.”

—Hebrews 2:17, 18.

Our “brother” who shares our humanity and was “tempted” like we are, is now our High Priest at the Father’s right hand. “Made like” us, He knows what we’re going through. He’s been hungry, thirsty, and exhausted. He’s felt the need for sympathy and understanding. He’s experienced the anguish of intense temptation. But above all, Jesus is qualified to be our priest because, as the Lamb of God, He died for our sins.

“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

—John 1:29.

As the sacrificial “Lamb of God,” Jesus experienced excruciating pain; He has plunged to the depths of physical and emotional suffering.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

—Isaiah 53:5.



Jesus assumed responsibility for our sins and died in our place. Each of us can accept by faith His payment of our debt of sin. This is the gospel, the good news for all human beings everywhere and for all time.

One of our Bible School pastors shared this personal experience with us: When our youngest daughter was three, she caught her finger in a folding chair, splintering the bone. As we rushed her to a doctor, her loud cries of pain really tore at our hearts. But they touched our five-year-old in a special way. I’ll never forget her words when the doctor cared for her sister’s injury. She sobbed, “Oh, Daddy, I wish it could have been my finger!”

When all humanity were crushed by sin and condemned to die eternally, Jesus must have felt, “Oh, Father, I wish it could have been me.” And the Father gave Jesus His wish at the cross. Our Saviour has experienced every agony and torment any of us have suffered—and more!

The Gospel in the Old Testament

When the people of Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, God instructed Moses to build a portable tabernacle as a sanctuary of worship “according to the pattern shown you on the mountain” (Exodus 25:40). Nearly 500 years later, King Solomon’s great stone temple replaced the portable one. But it was built on the same plan as the portable sanctuary.



God gave detailed instructions on the earthly sanctuary’s design and carefully explained how its services were to be carried out. Those Old Testament ceremonies taught the Hebrews through object lessons what the New Testament proclaims as realities through Christ’s life and death and through Christ’s ministry as our High Priest.

When God gave Moses the directions for building the sanctuary, what specific purpose did He have in mind?

“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I WILL DWELL AMONG THEM.”
—Exodus 25:8.

Sin caused a tragic separation between human beings and their Creator. The sanctuary was God’s way of showing how He can again live among us. It illustrates His plan of salvation

. The sanctuary, and later the temple, became the center of religious life and worship in Old Testament times. Its ceremonies reveal how God communicates with us and how we can communicate with Him. Each morning and evening the people could gather around the sanctuary and establish contact with God in prayer (Luke 1:10), claiming the promise: “I will meet with you” (Exodus 30:6).

It may surprise you that the Old Testament teaches the same gospel of salvation as does the New Testament. The Old Testament symbolism of Israel’s sanctuary actually depicts the activity of Jesus as Priest ministering on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. Rightly understood, the sanctuary and its services reveal what Jesus is doing now in the temple in heaven, and what He is doing now on earth to enrich and guide each of us in our daily lives.

Jesus’ Ministry for Us Revealed in the Sanctuary

Since the earthly sanctuary was patterned after the temple in heaven, it reflects the heavenly sanctuary where Christ now ministers. Exodus 25-40 describes the services and ceremonies of the wilderness sanctuary in great detail. A brief summary of the sanctuary furnishings appears in Exodus.

“Place the ark of the Testimony in it [tabernacle] and shield the ark with the curtain. Bring in the table and set out what belongs on it. Then bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. Place the gold altar of incense in front of the ark of the Testimony and put the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle. Place the altar of burnt offering in front of the entrance to the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting; place the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it. Set up the courtyard around it and put the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard.”

—Exodus 40: 3-8.

The sanctuary had two rooms, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. A courtyard surrounded the sanctuary. In the court in front of the sanctuary stood the brass altar on which the priests offered sacrifices, and the laver in which they washed.

The sacrifices offered on the brass altar symbolized Jesus, who through His death on the cross became “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). When the repentant sinner came to the altar with his sacrifice and confessed his sins, he received forgiveness and cleansing. In a similar way, the sinner today obtains cleansing through the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God (1 John 1:9).

In the first room, or Holy Place, the seven-branched lampstand burned continually, representing Jesus as the never-failing “light of the world” (John 8:12). The table of consecrated bread, the bread of God’s presence, symbolized His satisfying our physical and spiritual hunger as “the bread of life” (John 6:35). The golden altar of incense represented Jesus’ prayer ministry for us in the very presence of God (Revelation 8:3, 4).

The second room, or Most Holy Place, contained the gold-covered ark of the covenant. It symbolized the throne of God; its atonement cover, or mercy seat, represented the intercession of Christ on behalf of sinful human beings who have broken God’s moral law. The two tablets of stone on which God gave the Ten Commandments were kept below the mercy seat. Golden cherubim of glory hovered over the mercy seat on each end of the ark. A glorious light shone between these two cherubim, a symbol of the presence of God Himself.

A curtain hid the Holy Place from the view of the people as the priests ministered to them in the courtyard. A second curtain stood in front of the Most Holy Place, blocking this inner room from the view of the priests who entered the first room of the sanctuary.

When Jesus died on the cross, what happened to the curtain?

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”
—Matthew 27:51.

The Most Holy Place, which once contained the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God’s throne, was exposed when Jesus died. After the death of Jesus no curtain can come between a holy God and a sincere believer; Jesus, our High Priest, ushers us into the very presence of God.

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place [Greek: the holy places] by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.”
—Hebrews 10:19-22.

We have access to the throne room of heaven because Jesus is our High Priest at God’s right hand. He is not present there to shield us from the Father, but to enable us to come into God’s presence—into the Father’s heart of love. So “let us draw near.” Why? Because God welcomes us. As Jesus said, “I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you” (John 16:26, 27).

After our Saviour returned to heaven from His ministry on earth, the apostle John saw a vision of “the temple in heaven” (Revelation 14:17; 15:5; 16:17), the original heavenly sanctuary of which Moses’ tent was only a copy. In the Most Holy Place John noticed “the ark of his covenant” that contains the eternal, moral law of God in Ten Commandments (Revelation 11:19; Hebrews 9:4). He also observed “in heaven . . . before the throne, seven lamps” (Revelation 4:1, 5) and “the golden altar” of incense (Revelation 8:3). And most important, He saw Jesus walking among the seven candlesticks (Revelation 1:12, 13).

A Revelation of Christ Dying to Save Us

Just as the earthly sanctuary served as a miniature reproduction of the heavenly temple where Jesus now ministers for us, the services carried on in the earthly sanctuary were also an “example and shadow of what is in heaven” (Hebrews 8:5, KJV). But there is a striking difference: “The ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). The priests who served in the earthly temple could not themselves forgive sin, but at the cross Jesus “appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

The Old Testament book of Leviticus describes in detail the services carried on in the sanctuary. The ceremonial rituals were divided into two parts: the daily services, and the yearly services. Guide 13 deals with the yearly services.

In the daily services, the priests offered sacrifices both for the individual and for the entire congregation. When an individual sinned, he would bring an unblemished animal as a sin offering, “lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering” (Leviticus 4:29).

When the entire congregation was involved in some transgression, the priest performed almost the same ceremony for them. After killing the sacrificial animal, the priest took the blood of the offering into the sanctuary and placed some of it on the horns of the altar of incense. These blood sacrifices conveyed the truth that sin results in death, and the sinner can escape ultimate death only by having another person die in his or her place.

Christ’s sacrifice stands at the very heart of the sanctuary system.

First, the animal to be sacrificed must be “without blemish,” because it represented the One who is “holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26).

Second, the guilt of the sinner must be transferred to the guiltless animal by confession of sin and the laying on of hands. This symbolized Christ taking on our guilt at Calvary; the sinless One became “sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Third, the sacrificial animal had to be killed and its blood shed because it pointed forward to the supreme penalty that Christ suffered on the cross. What happened over and over in the Old Testament sanctuary pointed forward to Christ’s one great saving act. Having died for our sins, He entered the holy places “once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” for us (Hebrews 9:12).

Why the Blood?

Some people have complained:

“Christianity has too much blood in it.” Why is it that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22)? Why is blood such an important symbol in the Bible? It may not seem a very pleasant image at first, but the blood of Christ can speak eloquently to us.

1. Christ’s blood is a symbol of life.

“For the life of a creature is in the blood. . . . It is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”

—Leviticus 17:11.

Christ’s life was as important as His death. If it weren’t for His sinless life, the cross would serve no purpose. And had He not lived after He died, His death couldn’t save us. As Paul said,

“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”

—1 Corinthians 15:14.

When Jesus spilled His blood from the cross, He was pouring out His life for humanity; He was offering up His perfectly obedient life as a substitute for our failures.

2. Christ’s blood is a symbol of His death.

When He shed His blood on the cross, He was paying “the wages of sin”—death, eternal death. He experienced the agony of complete separation from God the Father. God the Son stepped into history to take on Himself the full results of sin and to demonstrate how tragic wrongdoing really is. He could then forgive sinners without trivializing sin.

3. Christ’s blood is a symbol of the suffering heart of God.

The cross reveals how much pain sin has brought to God. He is not a blood-thirsty deity demanding a sacrifice—He Himself was the sacrifice. When the Father and Son were torn apart at Calvary, the Father must have turned away in anguish as the Son died of a broken heart.

Christ’s blood represents the whole drama of the atonement, that amazing act which enabled God “to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20).

A Revelation of Jesus Living to Save Us

Those Old Testament temple sacrifices represented Christ's death for our sins. The work of the priests depicted Christ's ministry as High Priest. How does the work of the priest in the Hebrew sanctuary compare to what Jesus is now doing as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary?

“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, NOW TO APPEAR FOR US IN GOD’S PRESENCE. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages TO DO AWAY WITH SIN BY THE SACRIFICE OF HIMSELF.”

—Hebrews 9:24, 26.

It's almost too much to comprehend: Jesus offered “Himself” as “the sacrifice” on Calvary's cross. He offered Himself because nothing less would do.

What is Jesus' day-by-day work in the heavenly temple?

“Therefore he is able to save completely [margin: forever] those who come to God through him, because HE ALWAYS LIVES TO INTERCEDE for them.”

—Hebrews 7:25.

Jesus now “lives” to present His blood, His sacrifice, on our behalf. He is now working diligently to save every human being from the tragedy of sin. Some mistakenly assume that, as our Intercessor, Jesus is in heaven begging a reluctant God to forgive us. In fact, it is God who joyfully accepts His Son's sacrifice on our behalf. The Father and the Son worked together to create this means of reconciliation.

As our High Priest in heaven, Christ also pleads with humanity. He works to help the indifferent take a second look at grace, to help despairing sinners grasp hope in the gospel, and to help believers find more riches in the Word of God and more power in prayer. Jesus is molding our lives in harmony with God's commandments and helping us develop characters that will stand the test of time.

Jesus laid down His life for every person who has ever lived in this world. And now, as our Intercessor or Mediator, “He always lives” to lead people to accept His death for their sins. But human beings are free to reject the pardon Jesus offers. Although He reconciled the whole fallen world to Himself on the cross, He still can't save us unless we accept His grace. People will not be lost because they are sinners, but because they refuse to accept the pardon Jesus offers.

Sin destroyed the intimate relationship Adam and Eve once enjoyed with God. But Jesus, as the Lamb of God, died to free Adam and Eve and all humanity from sin and restore this lost friendship. Have you discovered Him as your High Priest, the One who ever lives to keep that relationship close and vibrant?

Christ's sacrificial death is utterly unique. Christ's heavenly ministry is incomparable. Only Christ brings God close beside us. Only Christ makes it possible for the divine Spirit to actually dwell in our hearts. Let's accept Him fully as the Saviour and Master of our lives.

Dear Heavenly Father: I thank You today that I have discovered Your loving interest in me personally. I'm so thankful that through Christ's ministry in the heavenly temple, You are constantly guiding my life and the lives of your people everywhere. Help me to respond fully and completely to Your gracious activity to save me and give me a better life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Lesson **13**
From Guilty Sinner
to Forgiven Saint

DISCOVER
online

- Face the Judgement Unafraid
 - A Timeline for Christ's Life
 - The Assurance of Sins Forgiven
 - A Timeline for the Judgement
 - Facing Your Life Record in the Judgement
- ...and more!



From Guilty Sinner To Forgiven Saint

There were no fingerprints. No weapon was ever discovered. No one saw the murderer enter the office of psychologist Michael Phillips. No one even heard the shots ring out. But Dr. Phillips was found sprawled behind his desk. Five bullets had pierced his vested suit.

It seemed the perfect crime. Detectives at first could find no clues. But then they noticed a tiny wire attached to a pencil holder on Dr. Phillips' desk. The wire led to a tape recorder in a desk drawer. The pencil holder, they realized, actually concealed a microphone.

The investigators quickly rewound the tape and, to their amazement, began to listen to a replay of the actual crime. A man named Anthony Inciarrano had entered the office and began a heated argument with Dr. Phillips. Shots rang out. The tape ended with the terrible moans of the psychologist, dying on the carpet.

Every awful detail had been recorded. The murderer thought his crime would forever remain a secret. He'd been so careful in leaving no clues. But there was an unseen witness who told the whole story.

In this guide we're going to learn about God's final judgment when human beings are "judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (Revelation 20:12). (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

It's a sobering topic. Those who've imagined that their misdeeds have been completely concealed will be in for a big surprise. Individuals, for example, who've made long, pious prayers in church each week, while secretly abusing their spouses at home, will have to confront a shocking record.

But you're also going to learn why the judgment is wonderfully good news for those who've found security in Christ.

You Can Face the Judgment Unafraid

Who will judge the world?

"The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son."
—John 5:22.

How did the cross prepare Christ to become our judge?

"God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, . . . so as to be JUST AND THE ONE WHO JUSTIFIES those who have faith in Jesus." —Romans 3:25, 26.

Christ's substitutionary death on the cross enables God to act as both a just Judge and a gracious Justifier. He can both defend God's unchanging standards and defend repentant sinners. When the watching universe asks the question, "How can an impartial judge declare a guilty person not guilty?" Christ can answer by pointing to the scars in His hands. He has absorbed the just penalty of sin in His own body.

[Guide 12 gave us insight into how Jesus, the Lamb of God and our representative before God's throne, has prepared us for the judgment day by resolving the sin problem.]

What does Jesus offer in exchange for our life of sin?

“God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

—2 Corinthians 5:21.

Because of Christ, God can perform a marvelous act of substitution. Our life of sin is exchanged, in a judicial sense, for Christ’s life of righteousness. Because of Jesus’ sinless life and death, God can forgive us and treat us as if we’d never sinned. What is more, He buries our sins in the depth of the sea and presents the record of His sinless life (which the cross has declared “admissible evidence”) as a replacement for the damning record of our sinful life. This is exactly what we need in the judgment in order to stand before a holy God.

Heaven preserves a record of every individual life (Revelation 20:12). God evaluates every action (1 Samuel 2:3). He keeps track of every word ever spoken and every thought that has ever crossed the mind (Matthew 12:36). That’s the bad news for those who imagine their secret sins and crimes will never return to haunt them.

But there is wonderfully good news for all who’ve sincerely accepted Christ as their Advocate before the Father: “The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Jesus has “wiped out” our sins (Acts 3:19). In place of our very flawed past, Christ presents the spotless record of His perfect life (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Let’s take an in-depth look at what qualifies Jesus, our Advocate and Judge, to deal with our sin problem. (If you have trouble with mathematics, which many people do, we’d like to suggest that you read the next three sections through rapidly. Don’t get bogged down in the numbers. You can understand the important facts in the rest of this guide even if you don’t fully understand the math.)

Christ Came On Time

At His baptism, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit:

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”

—Matthew 3:16, 17.

Following Christ’s anointing by the Holy Spirit at His baptism, the disciples realized that the Messiah had arrived:

“‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ).”

—John 1:41.



Knowing that the Hebrew word Messiah and the Greek word Christ both mean “the anointed one,” the disciples concluded that Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah at the time of His baptism.

Luke, a disciple of Jesus, recorded the date of Jesus’ anointing as the Messiah as the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1, 2). To us that would be the year A.D. 27.

The coming of the Messiah was predicted by many of the Old Testament prophets, and Christ appeared right on time as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. As He began His ministry, Jesus announced:

“The time has come . . . The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

—Mark 1:15.

The baptism and anointing of our Saviour happened on time. The King James Version says, “The time is fulfilled.” But to what time does Christ refer? The time had arrived for Jesus to appear and be anointed. More than 500 years before Jesus came to this world, the prophet Daniel predicted the moment when Jesus would appear as the Messiah.

Did Daniel the prophet predict that Jesus would appear and be anointed as the Messiah in A.D. 27? Here is Daniel’s prophecy:

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens’ [margin: weeks] and sixty-two ‘sevens’ [weeks].”

—Daniel 9:25.



Seven weeks and sixty-two weeks total sixty-nine weeks or 483 days ($7 \times 69 = 483$ days). In symbolic Bible prophecy we count each day as equaling one year (Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34), so the 483 days equals 483 years. Daniel predicted that a command would go forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and exactly 483 years after this command, the Messiah would appear.

Did Jesus appear as the Messiah at the appointed time? Artaxerxes issued the decree to rebuild Jerusalem in the year 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:7-13, 21-26). The period of 483 years, then, ended in A.D. 27. ($457 \text{ B.C.} + \text{A.D. } 27 = 484$.) However, the decree went forth during the year 457 and Christ was anointed during the year 27, making them both partial years, so the correct span of time would be 483 years.)

At the very time appointed, in A.D. 27, Jesus appeared with the message: “The time has come.” The accurate fulfillment of this Bible prophecy is impressive confirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah, God come down to our world in human flesh.

How long was Jesus to confirm the promise?

“He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven’ [margin: week].”
—Daniel 9:27, first part.

When we apply the year-day principle, this “week” would be seven years. So, for seven years Jesus would “confirm a covenant,” or promise, He had made to humanity—from A.D. 27 to A.D. 34. Shortly after Adam and Eve sinned, God made a covenant promise to them, stating that He would save the human race from sin through the death of Someone He would send (Genesis 3:15). Jesus’ death on the cross fulfilled that covenant promise.

What was to happen in the middle of this seventieth week?

“In the middle of the ‘seven’ [margin: week] he will put an end to sacrifice and offering.”
—Daniel 9:27, last part.

Jesus was crucified in A.D. 31, in “the middle of the week.” At the moment of Christ’s death, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51). The sacrificial offering that was about to be slain (a symbol of Jesus “the Lamb of God”) escaped from the priest’s hands. These events became a sign that God no longer wanted humanity to offer animal sacrifices. Fulfilling prophecy down to the letter, Jesus “put an end to” any need for animal sacrifices to be offered (Daniel 9:27). Since the time of Christ’s death, we have direct access to God through Jesus, the Lamb of God and our High Priest.

The Assurance of Sins Forgiven

According to Daniel's prophecy, why did Jesus die?

“The Anointed One will be cut off but not for himself.”

—Daniel 9:26, margin.

At his death on the cross, Jesus was “cut off, but not for himself.” Jesus lived a perfect life, the only one to do so in our world. He died “not for himself,” not to pay a penalty for His own sin, but to pay a penalty for your sins and my sins and for the sins of the entire world.

How can we know that God has forgiven all our sins and accepted us?

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. . . . ALL HAVE SINNED and fall short of the glory of God, and are JUSTIFIED freely BY HIS GRACE through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement [margin: taking away sin], THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD.”

—Romans 3:22-25.

The key points in these verses are: We “all have sinned,” but because of God's “grace,” all “are justified” who have “faith” in the cleansing power of Christ's “blood.”

Two things happen when we are justified:

- **God declares us forgiven, atoning for, or taking away, the guilt of our past sins.**
- **God declares us righteous; “righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ.”**

God's way of giving us complete security is to justify us by faith in Christ. Jesus promises, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). All of us worn out by the struggle to be good enough, to measure up on our own, can find real rest in Christ's gracious acceptance. All of us who are burdened by scars from the past and by an aching sense of inadequacy and shame, can find peace and wholeness in the Christ who at the cross opened His arms to us.

The Time for the Judgment to Begin

The eighth and ninth chapters of the great prophecy of Daniel are closely connected. (After you complete the DISCOVER Guides, you will have the opportunity to take a bible course on Daniel that gives a detailed explanation of both chapters.)

In the eighth chapter of Daniel, an angel showed the prophet a great panorama of the future. Daniel saw a ram and a he-goat, representing respectively Medo-Persia and Greece (Daniel 8:1-12, 20-26).

What is the fourth part of the prophecy?

“How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice . . . ?” He said to me, ‘It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings [or days, KJV]; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated [cleansed, KJV].’”

—Daniel 8:13, 14.



Daniel fainted before the angel could explain the 2,300-day part of the prophecy, and the eighth chapter closes with no interpretation of it. But later the angel reappeared and stated:

“I have now come to give you insight and understanding. . . . Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision: seventy ‘sevens’ [margin: weeks] are decreed [cut off, KJV] for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness”

—Daniel 9:22-24.

The 2,300 days are, of course, 2,300 years, each day standing for a year (Ezekiel 4:6). Seventy weeks, or 490 years, constituted the first section of the longer period of 2,300 years. Both time periods started in 457 B.C. when Persia issued the decree “to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” Subtracting 490 years from the 2,300 years, leaves 1,810. Adding 1,810 years to A.D. 34, when the 490 years ended, brings us to A.D. 1844.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

Cleansed – A Judgment

The angel told Daniel that in 1844, at the end of the 2,300 years, “the sanctuary will be reconsecrated [cleansed, KJV].” But what does that mean?

Since A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple at Jerusalem, God’s people have had no temple on earth. So the sanctuary to be cleansed, beginning in 1844, has to be the heavenly sanctuary of which the earthly temple was only a replica.



Now, what does the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary mean? Ancient Israel called the day for cleansing the earthly sanctuary Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It was really a day of judgment to the Hebrew people.

As we discovered in guide 12, Christ’s activity for us in the sanctuary has two phases: 1. The daily sacrifices and ceremonies focus on the priest’s ministry in the first room of the sanctuary, the Holy Place. 2. The yearly sacrifices and ceremonies concentrate on the High Priest’s ministry in the second room of the sanctuary, the Most Holy Place (Leviticus 16 and 23; Hebrews 9:1-5).

In the earthly temple, as people confessed their sins day by day, the blood of slaughtered animals was sprinkled on the corner of the altar, and the priests ate the meat in the Holy Place (Leviticus 4 and 6). Thus, in symbol, day after day the confessed sins were brought into the sanctuary and laid up there.

Then each year, on the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary was cleansed from all sins confessed during the past year (Leviticus 16). To effect this cleansing, the High Priest made a special sacrifice of a consecrated goat. He then carried its blood into the Most Holy Place and ministered before the ark of the covenant which contained the Ten Commandments beneath the atonement cover. The High Priest sprinkled this cleansing blood before the atonement cover to show that the blood of Jesus, the coming Redeemer, would pay the penalty for sin. The High Priest then symbolically removed the confessed sins from the sanctuary and placed them on the head of another goat, which was led out into the wilderness to die (Leviticus 16:20-22).

This ceremony on the yearly Day of Atonement cleansed the sanctuary from sin. The people regarded it as a day of judgment because those who refused to confess and seek divine pardon for their sins were considered unrighteous and were “cut off from His [God’s] people” (Leviticus 23:29).

What the High Priest did symbolically once a year, Jesus does once for all time as our High Priest (Hebrews 9:6-12). In the great judgment day He removes from the sanctuary the confessed sins of all who have accepted Jesus as Saviour. If we have confessed our sins, He will forever blot out the record of our sins at that time. This is the work of judgment that began in 1844.

In 1844 when the hour of God’s judgment began in heaven and Jesus began His work of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary, a judgment hour message began to be preached throughout the world (Revelation 14:6-7). A future DISCOVER guide will deal with this special message.

Facing Your Life Record In the Judgment

Since 1844, according to the prophecy in Daniel 8 and 9, Christ has taken on a judicial role in an investigative judgment, blotting out the record of our sins and cleansing the heavenly temple. Concerning this, Peter said:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that YOUR SINS MAY BE WIPED OUT, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ.”

—Acts 3:19.



This pre-advent judgment now going on in heaven investigates the records of all the righteous dead and of all the righteous who are alive in order to validate in the minds of the onlooking universe who will be among the saved when Jesus comes. As our Judge, Jesus “wipes out” all of the sins of the righteous from their life record in heaven, sweeping them away “like the morning mist” (Isaiah 44:22). He thrusts them into infinity—“as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12). Sin will vanish from the universe for all time (Revelation 21:1).

If you had the opportunity to alter your life record, what changes would you make? You’d probably rush to X out quite a few embarrassing entries. The good news is that Christ does this more thoroughly than we ever could. When your name comes up in judgment, it will be an easy matter to face your life record—IF you’ve accepted Christ as your Substitute, your Saviour.

Because Jesus is confident that after the righteous enter heaven they will never again sin, He clears their record of every trace of sin and credits them with His own perfect life. He then returns to earth to reward them:

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. . . . Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”

—Revelation 22:12, 14.

Are you ready for Jesus to come? Or is there something you’ve been hiding from Him? Do you have an open and honest relationship with the One who longs to be your Advocate?

An awareness of the judgment shouldn’t make us anxiously dig into our past for some sin that we may have forgotten to confess. But it should motivate us to put everything on the table before God—no secrets, no games.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

—1 John 1:9.

Confession simply means agreeing with God concerning the problems He convicts us about. We’re willing to face them. We accept His forgiveness and acknowledge our need of His power and grace.

While visiting a prison in Potsdam, King Frederick William I listened to a number of pleas for pardon. All the inmates swore that prejudiced judges, perjured



witnesses, or unscrupulous lawyers were responsible for their imprisonment. From cell to cell the same story of wronged innocence continued.

But at one cell the inmate had nothing to say. Surprised, Frederick joked, “I suppose you are innocent too.”

“No your Majesty,” the man answered, “I am guilty and richly deserve all that I get.”

The king turned to the guard and called out loudly, “Come and release this rascal quickly, before he corrupts this fine lot of innocent people.”

How do we prepare for the judgment? How do we get ready for Christ to come? Simply by an honest confession of the truth. Simply by acknowledging this great discovery: I richly deserve the penalty of death for my sins, but Another has taken my place and given me a wonderful pardon.

Make a commitment right now that, whatever happens, you’ll keep your relationship with Christ eye-to-eye honest and heart-to-heart sincere.

Delivered From Your Empty Way of Life

As the Lamb of God and our High Priest, Jesus not only covers our past and secures our future, He also empowers our present.

“You were redeemed FROM THE EMPTY WAY OF LIFE . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

—1 Peter 1:18-19.

He delivers us from an “empty way of life.” Jesus offers us the moral equivalent of a heart transplant.

“I WILL CLEANSE YOU from all your impurities and from all your idols. I WILL GIVE YOU A NEW HEART and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

—Ezekiel 36:25, 26.

All of us struggle with old habits and compulsions, but God promises to counter the pull of the old with the pull of the new:

“And I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT IN YOU and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

—Verse 27.

Remember these promises as you start on your spiritual journey. Let God’s perspective sink in deep, and Jesus will deliver you from an “empty way of life” through His Holy Spirit.

Dear Father in heaven: Thank You for the gift of Jesus who died, not for Himself, but for our sins. Thank You for appointing Him our Advocate, our High Priest, and our Judge. What hope and confidence that gives us! Just now I wish to again place my life in Jesus’ hands. I accept His promise to deliver me from an empty way of life and prepare me for heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **14** The Secret of Answered Prayer

- **Conversation With God**
- **How to Pray**
- **Private & Public Prayer**
- **Seven Secrets of Answered Prayer**
- **The Role of Angels When We Pray**
- **The Christian Lifestyle**



The Secret Of Answered Prayer

Anatoli Levitin, a Russian writer and historian, spent years in the Siberian Gulag where petitions to God must have seemed frozen to the ground. But he came back quite spiritually fit. “The greatest miracle of all is prayer,” he wrote. “I have only to turn mentally to God and at once I feel a force that pours into me from somewhere, into my soul, my whole being. What is it? Psychotherapy? No, it’s not psychotherapy, for where would I, an insignificant old man and tired of life, get this strength which renews and saves me, elevating me above the earth? It comes from outside me—and there is no force in the world which could ever resist it.”

In this lesson we’re going to look at how prayer, “the breath of the soul,” can help us build a stronger relationship with God and a healthier Christian life.

Conversation With God

How can we be sure God hears us when we pray?

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and PRAY TO ME, and I WILL LISTEN TO YOU. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’”

—**Jeremiah 29:11-13.** (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

What assurance did Jesus give that He will hear and answer our prayers?

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

—**Luke 11:9.**

Prayer is a two-way conversation. Jesus promises,

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

—**Revelation 3:20.**

How is it possible to sit down and have a nice evening of dinner conversation with Christ? First, by telling Him everything that’s on our hearts in prayer (not just making nice, pious speeches). Second, by listening carefully. As we meditate in prayer, God can speak to us directly. And as we read the Word of God devotionally, God will speak to us through its pages.

Prayer can become a way of life for the Christian.

“Be joyful always; PRAY CONTINUALLY; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

—**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.**

How can we “pray continually”? Do we have to stay on our knees all the time or constantly repeat phrases of adoration or petition? Of course not. The Bible has in mind a life so closely in touch with Jesus that we feel free to speak to Him anytime, anywhere.

“There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. There is nothing that can prevent us from lifting up our hearts in the spirit of earnest prayer. In the crowds of the street, in the midst of a business engagement, we may send up a petition to God and plead for divine guidance. . . . We should have the door of the heart open continually and our invitation going up that Jesus may come and abide as a heavenly guest in the soul.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 99.

One of the best ways to develop this kind of intimate relationship is to learn to meditate as we pray.

“May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.”
—Psalm 104:34.

“Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them.”
—1 Timothy 4:15, KJV.

“But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”
—Psalm 1:2.

Don’t just rush through a list of requests when you pray. Stick around. Listen. A little prayerful reflection can greatly enrich your relationship with God.

“Come near to God and he will come near to you.”
—James 4:8.

The closer we come to Jesus, the more we’re able to experience His presence. So keep within speaking distance of Jesus, never beyond the reach of His influence. Don’t worry about saying the right words. Just talk honestly and openly. Talk about everything. He’s gone through the agony of death itself in order to become your Intimate Friend.

How to Pray

When we engage in formal prayers in public or in private, we may wish to follow the outline of the prayer Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. He taught His disciples the Lord's Prayer in response to their request: "Teach us to pray."

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

—Matthew 6:9-13, margin.

According to the pattern Jesus provided in His prayer, we are to come to God as our heavenly Father, asking that His will take charge in our hearts just as His will prevails in all of heaven. We seek Him for our physical needs, for forgiveness and for a forgiving attitude. We always remember that our ability to resist sin comes from God. Christ's prayer concludes with expressions of praise.

On another occasion Jesus instructed His disciples to pray to the Father "in my name" (John 16:23)—that is, to pray in harmony with Jesus' principles. That's why Christians usually close their prayers with the words: "In Jesus' name, Amen." Amen is a Hebrew word that means "Let it be so."

Sometimes Christians refer to the Lord's Prayer as a model prayer. They often memorize it and repeat it in public. Although the Lord's Prayer gives guidelines on what to pray for and how to formulate a prayer, our communication with God works best as a spontaneous composition of the heart.

A look at the various prayers of men and women in the Bible teaches us one basic lesson: pray about everything. God invites us to pray about critical matters: forgiveness for our sins (1 John 1:9), increased faith (Mark 9:24), the necessities of life (Matthew 6:11), healing from suffering and disease (James 5:15). At the same time He assures us that we can take all our needs and cares to Jesus; nothing is too small to pray about.

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." —1 Peter 5:7.

Our Saviour is interested in every detail of our lives. God delights in our prayers. His heart warms when our hearts reach out to Him in love and faith.

Private Prayer

Most of us have things we hesitate sharing even with our closest friends, things we keep hidden away in a corner of our minds. God wants us to unburden ourselves completely in private prayer: one-on-one with Him. It's not that He needs any information. The Almighty knows our secret fears, hidden motives, and buried resentments better than we do ourselves. But we need to open up our hearts to the One who knows us intimately and loves us infinitely. Healing can begin only when Jesus can touch the wounds. We need to admit our problems and recognize our needs. Growth can come only when Jesus can reach our greatest weaknesses.

When we pray, Jesus our High Priest is near to help us in every time of need:

“We do not have a high priest who is unable to SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, but we have one who has been TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS WE ARE—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

—Hebrews 4:15, 16.

Do you feel anxious, stressed-out, guilty? Lay it out before the Lord. Prayer brings us within the circle of Christ's mercy and grace. He can then supply our every need.

Should we have a special place for private prayer?

“When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

—Matthew 6:6.

In addition to praying when walking in the street, working on the job, or enjoying a social gathering, every Christian should have a time set aside each day for personal prayer. Daniel, the top government official in Babylon and a mighty man of God, prayed three times a day—morning, noon, and night. Almost all growing Christians have a set time and place to spend with God in Bible study and prayer. Make your daily appointment with God at the time when you feel most alert and can concentrate the best.

Public Prayer

Joining with others in prayer creates a special bond and taps God's power in a special way.

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

—Matthew 18:20.

Remember that the Lord's Prayer takes less than a minute to repeat. Public prayers should be brief. Don't turn them into speeches that make it seem you're really talking to an audience, not to God. Don't feel you have to speak in unnatural or theatrical tones; simple reverence and humility are much better ways to approach the King of kings and Lord of lords.

One of the greatest things we can do as a family is to develop a prayer life together. Show your kids that we can take our needs to Him directly. They'll get excited about God as they see Him respond to prayer in the practical details of life. Make family worship a happy, relaxed time of sharing.

Seven Secrets of Answered Prayer

When Moses prayed, the Red Sea parted. When Elijah prayed, fire came down from heaven. When Daniel prayed, an angel shut the mouths of ravenous lions. The Bible presents us with many exciting accounts of answered prayer. And it recommends prayer as the way to tap into the mighty power of God. Consider Christ's great promise:

“You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”
—John 14:14.

Jesus “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20). God promises, “Call to me and I will answer you” (Jeremiah 33:3). And yet some prayers seem to go unheard. Why? Are any conditions attached to prayer? Here are seven principles that will help you pray more effectively.

1. Keep close to Christ.

“IF YOU REMAIN IN ME and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”
—John 15:7.

When we make our relationship with God a priority and keep in touch with Him, we'll be listening and looking for answers to our prayers that, otherwise, might go undetected.

2. Keep trusting God.

“If you BELIEVE, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”
—Matthew 21:22.

Faith means that our prayers are more than just knocking on wood; we're really looking to our Heavenly Father to supply our need. If you're troubled by a lack of faith remember that our Saviour performed a miracle for the man who pled in desperation:

“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”
—Mark 9:24.

Just concentrate on exercising the faith you DO have; don't worry about the faith you DON'T have.

3. Surrender calmly to God's will.

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, he hears us.”
—1 John 5:14.

Remember that God wants to teach us, as well as give us things, through prayer. So sometimes He says, “No”; sometimes He turns us in another direction. This can help us pray more “on target” in the future. Prayer is a means of getting more and more in synch with God's will. So we need to remain sensitive to God's responses and learn from them. Keeping track of your specific requests and what happens as a result can be a great help.

The Bible reveals God's will to us (Psalm 119:105, 133), and the Holy Spirit helps us zero in on the right mark: "The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:27). Remember that our will would always coincide with God's will if we could see as He does.

4. Wait patiently on God.

"I WAITED PATIENTLY for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry."
—Psalm 40:1.

The main point here is to keep your focus on God, keep your focus on His solution. Don't just send out a quick plea and then stare in horror at the problem, letting it overwhelm you. Don't ask God for support one minute and then try to drown your troubles in frenzied pleasure-seeking the next. Wait patiently on the Lord. In our age of microwave dinners and remote control entertainment we badly need that discipline.

5. Don't hang on to any sin.

"If I had CHERISHED SIN IN MY HEART, the Lord would not have listened."
—Psalm 66:18.

Known sin short-circuits the power of God in our lives; it separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2). This doesn't mean you have to be perfect in order to get an answer to prayer. It simply means you can't hang onto sin with one hand and reach out for divine help with the other. Sincere confession and repentance solves the problem.

If we're not willing to allow God to free us from evil thoughts, words, and deeds, our prayers won't be effective.

"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."
—James 4:3.

God isn't going to answer "yes" to selfish or mean-spirited prayers. Keep your ears open to God's law, His will, and He will keep His ears open to your petitions.

"If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable."
—Proverbs 28:9.

6. Feel the need of God.

God responds to those who ask for His presence and power in their lives.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."
—Matthew 5:6.

7. Persist in prayer.

Jesus illustrated the need to persist in our petitions by telling the story of a very stubborn widow who kept coming to a judge with her request. At last the judge said in exasperation,

"Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!" And the Lord said, 'Listen to

what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?"

—Luke 18:5, 7.

Don't just throw up a casual, just-in-case request to God. Discuss all your needs, your hopes, and your dreams with Him. Ask for particular blessings. Call for help in time of need. Keep seeking, and keep listening, until you learn something from God's response.

Angels Minister to the Needs of Those Who Pray

When we pray, God sends angels who seem not to be bound by limitations of speed and distance to answer our prayers.

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

—Hebrews 1:14.

The Psalmist rejoiced that through the ministry of the angel of the Lord his prayers were answered:

"I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."

—Psalm 34:4, 7.

After forty days of temptation, in answer to Jesus' prayer, "the devil left him, and angels came and attended him" (Matthew 4:11). When we pray, God sends angels to answer our prayers.

Scripture suggests that each Christian has an accompanying guardian angel.

"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that THEIR ANGELS in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

—Matthew 18:10.

Exodus 23:20; Hebrews 13:2; Psalm 91:11,12; and Acts 5:19 all speak of angels ministering to those whose lifestyle included prayer.

Prayer is one of the grandest experiments we can engage in as human beings. So begin building up your personal experiences today; make your own discoveries. Because of our prayers:

"The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

—Philippians 4:5-7.

Father in heaven: I want to know You more intimately. I want to keep in constant touch with You through prayer. Please teach me how to pray more effectively. Show me how to listen better, how to aim better, how to respond better. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

The Christian Lifestyle

This lesson and lessons 15 to 20 showcase the Christian lifestyle.

Does the Bible delineate a distinct Christian lifestyle?

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to PUT OFF YOUR OLD SELF, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to PUT ON THE NEW SELF, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

—Ephesians 4:22-24.

The Christian is to “put off” the “old self” that resulted from “deceitful desires,” and “put on the new self” that is “created to be like God.” At the new birth we are “created” to be a different kind of person with a distinct Christian lifestyle.

The Bible urges us to continue putting on this new life as the Holy Spirit works to transform our characters:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and LET US RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE THE RACE marked out for us. LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. CONSIDER HIM who endured such opposition from sinful men, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT GROW WEARY AND LOSE HEART.”

—Hebrews 12:1-3.

Scripture here uses the imagery of a great athletic arena in which the Christian runs a spiritual race. The spectators in the arena, the “great cloud of witnesses,” include all the great men and women of faith featured in the previous chapter (Hebrews 11). We are the contestants.

As Christians we are to “throw off” everything that slows us down and put all our energies into winning the race. To insure victory, we must “fix our eyes on Jesus,” and “consider him”—model our thoughts and actions after Christ. His lifestyle and His gift of eternal life are made possible because He “endured the cross” and became the Conqueror over sin and death on our behalf.

What can we learn from this “great cloud of witnesses” from Old Testament times? At your leisure, read Hebrews 11, and note how “faith” enabled these great men and woman to overcome every obstacle and every trial. Their victories can be yours—even amid the worst that life can dish out. As you read chapter 11, notice the words that suggest resolute decisiveness and determined action.

These men and women succeeded against the odds through “faith” in the coming Messiah. The key to their success, as well as our success as Christians, is to “fix our eyes on Jesus,” since He is the focus of our faith. Christ is the motivating power in the Christian life. He gives us faith, an essential quality in the Christian lifestyle, and a motivating factor for healthy human growth.

Through faith in Jesus the Christian lifestyle results in perfect peace, and a perfect sense of security and well-being.

“You [God] will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast [stayed on thee, KJV], because he trusts in you.”

—Isaiah 26:3.

That’s what happens when we center our lives on the living Christ.

The wife of a missionary in Singapore once asked an elderly man who’d become a Christian after living most of his life as a Buddhist: “Mr. Lim, what difference do you find between being a Buddhist and being a Christian?”

“That’s easy,” he answered. “Since I’ve found Jesus as my Saviour, I have such a peace in my heart.”

New believers are often asked, “Now that you are living a Christian lifestyle, what difference do you notice in your life?”

The most common answer is: “I’ve found peace in my heart.”

This lesson and the six lessons which follow, showcase the Christian lifestyle; they reveal the secrets of a happy Christian life. They will help you build a stronger relationship with God and a healthier Christian life. So begin fixing your eyes on Jesus today and you can be part of that final victory celebration when Christ’s peace reigns unchallenged.

DISCOVER *online*

Lesson **15**

The Secret of Happiness

- **Guidebook to the Christian Lifestyle**
- **A Transforming Friendship**
- **What Jesus Said About the 10 Commandments**
- **Guide to a Happy Life**
...and more!



The Secret Of Happiness

In 1943, Japanese occupation forces ordered hundreds of American and European “enemy nationals” to an internment camp in China’s Shantung Province. They had to endure months of boredom, frustration, overcrowding, and fear.

Personalities clashed, tempers flared. The two groups thrown into sharpest relief were the businessmen and the missionaries—they held each other in strictest contempt. Petty squabbles multiplied.

But one man seemed able to span the gap between these two groups, a man described by an internee as “without a doubt the person most in demand and most respected and loved in camp”—Eric Liddell, a missionary from Scotland.

A Russian prostitute in camp would later recall that Liddell was the only man who’d ever done anything for her without wanting to be repaid in kind. When she first came into camp, alone and snubbed, he put up some shelves for her.

Another internee recalled, “He had a gentle, humorous way of soothing ruffled tempers.”

At one angry meeting of the internees, everybody was demanding that someone else do something about the restless teenagers who were getting into trouble. Liddell came up with a solution. He organized sports, crafts, and classes for the kids, and began spending his evenings with them.

Liddell had won fame and glory at the 1924 Olympics, taking a gold medal in the 400 meters race. But in that cramped, wearying compound, he showed himself a winner in the Christian race as well, earning the admiration of the most worldly internees.

What made him so special? You could have discovered his secret at 6 a.m. each morning. That’s when he tiptoed quietly past sleeping companions, settled down at a Chinese table, and lit a small lamp to illuminate his notebook and Bible. Eric Liddell sought grace and strength each day in the riches of God’s Word.

The Guidebook to the Christian Lifestyle

The Bible was written as a guidebook for the Christian. It is full of stories of real people like us who have experienced the same challenges we face every day. Getting to know these Bible characters—their joys and sorrows, their problems and opportunities, their search for fulfillment—helps us mature as Christians.

The psalmist David pictures our daily dependence on the Word of God by comparing it to what we would call a flashlight:

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

—Psalm 119:105. *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

The illumination we get each day from the Bible enables us to take the next step forward; it’s how we make progress. It makes clear the qualities we need most in our lives and the principles of spiritual growth. Above all, the Bible presents us with Jesus, the Light of the World. Life only makes sense when Jesus is shining on it.

A Transforming Friendship

Christ wants the Bible to be as real to you as a personal letter from a close friend.

“I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

—John 15:15.

Jesus passed on the most important truths in the universe because He wants the very best for us. His Word brings us into God’s inner circle: those He confides in and personally instructs.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.”

—John 16:33.

In order to experience this peace, this secure relationship with Christ, we need to read the letters He sends us. That’s what the Bible is: correspondence from heaven. Don’t leave those letters unopened just because they’re so familiar or have always been lying around. The transforming message you need is waiting to be discovered somewhere in the Word of God.

Here is one typical testimony about the Bible’s impact:

“I needed help, and I found it in Jesus. Every want was supplied, the hunger of my soul was satisfied; the Bible is to me the revelation of Christ. I believe in Jesus because He is to me a divine Saviour. I believe the Bible because I have found it to be the voice of God to my soul.”

—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, page 461.

The Bible Summarized in Ten Commandments

Today we have the entire Bible as the guidebook for a healthy Christian lifestyle. But before humanity had the Bible, God gave His people, Israel, the Ten Commandments as a summary of biblical guidelines for daily living (Exodus 20).

A brief look at the Ten Commandments helps us understand why Jesus, the prophets who wrote the Bible, and many modern scholars have been led to affirm that the Ten Commandments are an indispensable basis for right living.

The Ten Commandments naturally fall into two divisions. The first four define our relationship to God, and the last six define our relationship to other people. They are found in Exodus 20:3-17.

The first two commandments outline our relationship to God and to His worship.

I. “You shall have no other gods before me.”

II. “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them. . . .”
The 3rd and 4th commandments sketch our relationship to God’s name and to His holy day.

III. “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

IV. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. . . .”

Commandments 5 and 7 safeguard family bonds.

V. “Honor your father and your mother”

VI. “You shall not murder.”

VII. “You shall not commit adultery.”

Commandments 6, 8, 9, and 10 protect us in social relationships.

VIII. “You shall not steal.”

IX. “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

X. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

The Ten Commandments are a condensation of the Bible teaching on how we ought to live. They define our relationship both to God and to other people. They are the guideposts of a Christian lifestyle.



What Jesus Said About the Ten Commandments

One day as Jesus was teaching, an enthusiastic young man hurried up to Him and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16). Christ could see that he was wrestling with a money problem and advised him to get rid of his possessions and to “obey the commandments” (verse 17).

The young man tried to sidestep Christ’s diagnosis of his problem by asking which commandments He was talking about. Jesus listed several of the Ten Commandments: those against murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and dishonoring his parents (Verses 18, 19).

Finally, the “rich young ruler” turned and walked away sadly (verses 20-22). He wasn’t willing to take the prescription. He could give mental assent to the Ten Commandments, but he wasn’t willing to obey the spirit of the law by abandoning his selfish way of life.

Guide to a Happy Life

The Ten Commandments show us the boundaries within which healthy relationships, with God and each other, can grow. This is why God could appeal so passionately through Isaiah:

“If only you had paid attention to my commands, YOUR PEACE would have been like a river, YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS like the waves of the sea.”

—Isaiah 48:18.

Jesus pointed to obedience as the way to real joy:

“If you OBEY MY COMMANDS, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I HAVE TOLD YOU THIS SO that my joy may be in you and THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE.”

—John 15:10, 11.

The Bible presents the Ten Commandments as an unchangeable, indispensable, perfect guide to happy living. Human experience testifies to their timeless validity.

Jesus was one in a chorus of voices who declare that the road to happiness is paved with loving obedience to God’s commandments, for they are God’s basic principles for living a happy life.

The Ten Commandments

An Indispensable New Testament Guide

In the New Testament, Paul testified:

“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.”
—Romans 7:12.

James adds his weight to the testimony of Paul by stating:

“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.”
—James 2:10-12.

Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the past century, declared: “The law of God is divine law;—holy, heavenly, perfect. . . . There is not a command too many; there is not one too few, but it is so incomparable that its perfection is proof of its divinity.”

John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist church, wrote this about the enduring nature of the law:

“The moral law contained in Ten Commandments . . . He [Christ] did not take away. . . . Every part of this law must remain in force upon all man- kind and in all ages.”
—Sermons, vol. 1, pp. 221, 222.

Several years ago, W. J. Cameron made this statement in an address given on the CBS radio network: “There are certain minimum terms on which people can live together, and if these be broken, social stability is lost. . . . The most comprehensive statement known to us of the minimum terms on which society can be maintained is the Ten Commandments. . . .

“This is the basic law on which all Anglo-Saxon laws are founded. Basic, because it is first written in the normal constitution of human nature. Commandments so-called, they simply state what right-minded people naturally do, and what no law can compel wrong-minded persons to do. Thus, they are more than commandments; they are the profound constitution of good society. Analyze any one of them and in it you will find an indispensable social necessity. No strong social structure has arisen where any of these elements has been lacking.”

Billy Graham, the world’s most respected evangelical evangelist, regards the Ten Commandments so highly that he has written an entire book about their importance to the Christian.

Power to Obey

We now have the Bible answer to the question: Which will lead to happiness—entering into a life of disobedience and sin, or into a life of obedience to God? The Bible and the Ten Commandments are an unchangeable, indispensable, perfect guide to happy living. Human experience testifies to the validity of this Bible truth.

Yet hearts are still in conflict. One lady expressed it like this: “I believe the Ten Commandments are binding, I know the Bible teaches that I should follow them, I believe that most of the great preachers accept them as being a guide to our conduct, I am certain that keeping them leads to happiness, and I have tried my very best to keep them; but I just can’t do it. I simply can’t keep them and I’m beginning to believe that no one else can.”

It’s a common experience to find greater difficulty in keeping the law than in coming to believe in its validity. Why? People do not have the innate ability to keep the law. Nothing which we possess by nature can elevate our life into a perfect obedience to God’s law:



“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”

—Romans 8:7.

An unbelieving sinner may try to live a life of obedience to God’s commands. But in answer to such trying, over and over again from within the sin-polluted heart of a person comes the frustrated response, “I can’t obey!”

There is only one way of obedience; the Ten Commandments tell us that we are sinners in need of a Saviour:

“Through the law we become conscious of sin.”

—Romans 3:20.

The function of the law is to lead us to the utter realization that we are hopelessly lost. For what reason?

“The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

—Galatians 3:24.

Jesus is the answer! Once we are at Jesus’ feet in absolute helplessness, by faith we can receive power from Him to obey the law.

Loving Obedience to the Ten Commandments

Jesus tells us that obedience is the result of love:

“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”
—John 14:15.

If we love God, we will obey the first four commandments which define our relationship to God; and if we love people, we will obey the last six commandments which define our relationship with others (See Matthew 22:36-40).

The Apostle Paul agrees with the thought that love for God and for our neighbors will result in our being law-keepers rather than law-breakers:

“HE WHO LOVES HIS FELLOWMAN HAS FULFILLED THE LAW. THE COMMANDMENTS, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, ARE SUMMED UP IN THIS ONE RULE: ‘LOVE your neighbor as yourself’. . . Therefore LOVE IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW.”
—Romans 13:8-10.

The person who tramples on the Ten Commandments sins:

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”
—1 John 3:4.

But thank God, we have a Saviour who came to this world and died, was resurrected, and now lives for one purpose:

“But you know that he appeared SO THAT HE MIGHT TAKE AWAY OUR SINS.”
—Verse 5.

Our Saviour forgives and removes our sinfulness:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”
—1 John 1:9.

And He promises to give us His love to love with—the great antidote to a life of selfishness:

“GOD HAS POURED OUT HIS LOVE INTO OUR HEARTS by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”
—Romans 5:5.

We have no innate ability to keep God’s law. In fact, our sinful minds reject God’s law (Romans 3:10). God’s love “poured out . . . in our hearts” is our need, for “he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law” (Romans 5:5; 13:8). Love is the motivating power of the Christian life. Because we love God, we naturally want to obey Him, “for Christ’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14).

God's Grace and Obedience to the Law

Salvation is a gift. We cannot earn it. We can only accept it by faith. We receive justification (right standing with God) as a gift, solely through faith because of God's grace.

“For it is BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED, through FAITH—and this not from yourselves, it is THE GIFT OF GOD—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

—Ephesians 2:8, 9.

We cannot keep the commandments by our own works—by trying. We cannot keep the commandments to be saved. But when we come to Jesus and are saved, his love fills our hearts. And as a result of this divine grace and acceptance, our desire to follow and obey Christ intensifies; we begin to obey His commandments through the power of His love in our hearts. Christ's “love is shed abroad in our hearts,” and we begin to love with His love (Romans 5:5, KJV).

“This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.”

—1 John 5:3.

According to John, “Everyone who sins breaks the law” (1 John 3:4). But after suggesting that the Christian is no longer under the condemnation of the law because of Christ's death for our sins on Calvary, Paul adds:

“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.”

—Romans 3:31.

Paul stresses the futility of human effort and indicates that we are not under the law as a way of salvation, but “under grace,” then he asks:

“Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!”

—Romans 6:15.

Since “faith without deeds is useless [dead, KJV],” a heart motivated by love produces a life of loving obedience! (James 2:20, 22; 1 John 5:2). To love Christ is to obey His commandments:

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.”

—John 14:21.

Paul echoes Jesus' teaching:

“What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

—Romans 8:3, 4.

Living in the Spirit's power translates into a growing ability to fulfill the “righteous requirements” of the law.

Eric Liddell demonstrated that, even in the worst of circumstances, the believer who is plugged into God's power can live a contented, obedient life. Liddell demonstrated a winsome grace in a time of stress and fear. His love relationship with God enabled Him to meet "the righteous requirements of the law" through his loving relationships with others in the internment camp. A love relationship with the crucified and risen Saviour can produce that quality of life. For when Christ's love fills our hearts, it becomes our nature to obey His commandments.

"The requirements of the law are written on [our] hearts."

—Romans 2:15.

Have you discovered this secret for yourself? Jesus' love for you caused Him to give His life for your sin. He offers to empower all your relationships with His love and to "equip you with everything good for doing his will" (Hebrews 13:21). What is your response?

Dear Father in heaven: Thank You for giving us Your Word as a guidebook for Christian living. Thank You for giving us Jesus as our Saviour and our Example. Thank You for the power of Your love which makes it possible to live for You according to the Bible and the Ten Commandments. Thank you for the fulfilling life that loving obedience brings. Please fill my heart with more and more of that love. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Lesson **16**
**The Secret
of Heavenly Rest**

DISCOVER
online

- **The Remedy for High-Tension Living**
- **A Daily Link With Jesus**
- **A Weekly Link With Jesus**
- **The Benefits of Sabbath-Rest**
- **A Foretaste of Heavenly Rest**



The Secret Of Heavenly Rest

Just a few years ago sociologists were predicting we would soon have more leisure time than we'd know what to do with. Testimony before a Senate subcommittee in 1967 maintained that by 1985 people would be working just 22 hours a week.

There were good reasons for those confident predictions. Computers were crunching through month-long tasks in fractions of a second. And robots had begun to handle the grueling jobs of heavy industry.

But after the computers have been whirring and the satellites spinning and the automation automating—we're more out of breath than ever. As a Manhattan architect put it: "Technology is increasing the heartbeat."

People are running out of time these days. For example, between 1967 and 1985 the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the average American shrunk 37 percent, and more than 40 percent of American workers put in more than 40 hours a week. Nearly 20 percent had second jobs. And that trend has continued to the present.

Above all, families are running out of time. Husbands and wives communicate more and more through the answering machine. It's hard to schedule "quality time" with the kids, much less with each other.

One mother of a 14-year-old discovered her daughter had contracted a sexually transmitted disease. The news was quite a blow, but her response was to confide to a friend: "I know she has too much freedom, but I can't give up my social life to watch her all the time."

Priorities upside down. Time running out.

One study in a small U.S. community showed that the average time per day that fathers spent alone with their very young sons was—37 seconds! Families are out of time and out of touch. How can we slow down enough to get in touch again?

The Remedy For High Tension Living

Jesus understands the problems of families under stress and He wants us to grasp this fact first of all: spiritual rest is part of the quality of life:



"COME TO ME, all you who are weary and burdened, and I WILL GIVE YOU REST. Take my yoke upon you and LEARN FROM ME, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find REST FOR YOUR SOULS."

—Matthew 11:28, 29. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

The Bible suggests we experience this kind of rest in two ways: coming to Christ on a daily and a weekly basis.

A Daily Link With Jesus

Jesus should have been “running out of time” all the time. Crowds constantly clamored for His attention. In a brief period of three-and-a-half years He had to carry out a spiritual revolution that would change life on planet earth forever. He was constantly dodging Pharisee spies and plots.



And yet Christ communicated a peaceful, tranquil spirit to everyone around Him. How? He invested time each day communing with His Heavenly Father. He depended on His Father continually for the resources to meet life’s challenges.

“Just as the living Father sent me and I LIVE BECAUSE OF THE FATHER, so the one who FEEDS ON ME will live because of me.”

—John 6:57.

Our Saviour depended on the Father. If we are to live the serene, steady life that He did, we must daily “feed” on Jesus—let His Word and Spirit fill us and shape us. The best way to counter the forces burning us out as individuals and tearing us apart as families is to invest quality time with Christ. He tells us:

“REMAIN IN ME, and I will remain in you. . . . APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING.”

—John 15:4, 5.

One of the greatest needs of our time is for people to tap the spiritual resources available through forming a day-by-day relationship with Jesus. Guides 14 and 15 showed us how we do that through daily prayer and Bible study.

One very important point that needs to be emphasized about our relationship with Christ is this: His finished work on the cross. True rest, real security, can only exist because of the great accomplishment Jesus referred to when he cried out as he was dying: “It is finished” (John 19:30). In other words, His work of redemption was completed.

“But now he [Christ] has appeared ONCE FOR ALL . . . TO DO AWAY WITH SIN by the sacrifice of himself.”

— Hebrews 9:26.

“WE HAVE BEEN MADE HOLY through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ ONCE FOR ALL. . . . By one sacrifice HE HAS MADE PERFECT FOREVER those who are being made holy.”

—Hebrews 10:10, 14.

When Jesus died, He did “away with sin.” The devil can no longer hold our sins against us, for our Substitute made full provision at Calvary for forgiveness. Since Jesus “has made perfect forever those who are being made holy,” Satan can no longer hold our failures and inadequacies against us.

That’s why it’s said that the believer who has confessed his or her sins can “rest” in the finished work of Christ. We’ve made it; we’re accepted. Guilt is the force that drives most compulsive behavior. Guilt lies behind much of the frantic pace of our lives today.

But Jesus solved the guilt problem once and for all at the cross. Jesus' cry, "It is finished," sealed His promise of "I will give you rest" as an established fact. Christ completed the work of redeeming us at Calvary [Titus 2:14], then He rested in the tomb over the Sabbath, and rose from the grave Sunday morning as the Victor over sin and death. The Christian can have no greater assurance than to rest in the finished work of Christ.

"Therefore . . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart IN FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH, . . . let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL, and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

—Hebrews 10:19, 22-24.

Because He "who promised is faithful," we can enter into the salvation-rest Jesus has promised. The stability, peace, and rest we experience in Jesus every day is a result not of anything we do, but of what He did at the cross.

We can rest in Christ because our salvation is assured. That assurance creates a response of loving obedience [as we saw in guide 15]. And it motivates us to spend time with Christ each day, feeding on His Word and breathing in the atmosphere of heaven through prayer. A rendezvous with Jesus helps us turn a stressed-out lifestyle into a peaceful and purposeful life.

A Weekly Link With Jesus

After Christ created the world in six days (Colossians 1:16-17), He provided *Sabbath-rest*, which is a wonderful *weekly* opportunity for us to cultivate our connection with Him.

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he RESTED from all his work. And God BLESSED the seventh day and MADE IT HOLY, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

—Genesis 1:31-2:3.

As their Creator, Jesus “rested” on the first Sabbath with Adam and Eve, and He “blessed” that day and “made it holy.”

God established a seven-day weekly cycle—not for His own benefit, but for Adam and Eve and for us today. Because He cared so much for the two people He had made, He planned that every seventh day throughout their lives should be dedicated to seeking His presence. Each Sabbath, as He called it, was to be for them a day of both physical rest and spiritual refreshment.

The entrance of sin into our world only made the need for Sabbath rest more acute. The same Saviour who promised Adam and Eve “rest,” gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai (1 Corinthians 10:1-4) about two thousand years later. Jesus chose to place the Sabbath-rest commandment at the very heart of the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment reads:

“REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY BY KEEPING IT HOLY. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he RESTED on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD BLESSED the Sabbath day and MADE IT HOLY.”

—Exodus 20:8-11.

God established the Sabbath as a day to “remember” the Lord who “made the heavens and the earth.” Sabbath rest each week links us with the Creator who blessed this day and set it apart.

When Jesus lived on earth, He took advantage of every opportunity to sustain His union with the Father. He benefited from Sabbath rest by worshiping on Sabbath, as Luke tells us:

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and ON THE SABBATH DAY he went into the synagogue, AS WAS HIS CUSTOM.”

—Luke 4:16.

If the divine-human Jesus needed to rest in His Father’s presence on the Sabbath day, we human beings certainly need it more. When Jesus swept aside the legal restrictions the Jews had placed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-12), He pointed out that God had made it to benefit people:

“He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’”

—Mark 2:27, 28.

Jesus highlighted the importance of the Sabbath even in His death. He died on Friday, the “Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin” (Luke 23:54). At that moment He declared, “It is finished,” that is, His work of coming to this world and dying as substitute for the human race was complete (John 19:30; 4:34; 5:30). The great work of redemption had been accomplished. Then as if to celebrate His finished mission, Jesus rested in the tomb over the Sabbath. Just as Christ completed His work of creation on the sixth day and then rested on the seventh day, so through dying on the cross He completed His redemptive work on the sixth day, and then rested on the seventh.

On Sunday morning Jesus came out from the tomb, a victorious Saviour (Luke 24:1-7). He had already asked His disciples to maintain the Sabbath encounter with Him after His resurrection. Speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place nearly forty years after His death, He charged them:

“Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.”

—Matthew 24:20.

Our Saviour wanted His disciples and their converts to continue the practices He had taught them. He wanted them to experience both salvation-rest and Sabbath-rest. They did not disappoint Him. The disciples continued to observe the Sabbath after Christ’s death (see Luke 23:54-56; Acts 13:14; 16:13; 17:2; 18:1-4).

The beloved apostle John kept up his weekly link with Christ on the Sabbath day. In his later years he wrote, “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit” (Revelation 1:10). According to Jesus, “the Lord’s Day” is the Sabbath, “for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8).

On the Sabbath we celebrate the Lord’s two greatest accomplishments on our behalf: creating us and saving us. This Sabbath experience will continue in the new earth:

“‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the LORD, . . . ‘from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the LORD.”

— Isaiah 66:22, 23.

God originally established the Sabbath as a memorial of creation, so it’s fitting that His last-day message should include a call back to worshipping our Creator through obeying His commandments (Revelation 14:7, 12). This message from the last book in the Bible includes observing the Sabbath commandment as a memorial to the Creator.

The Benefits of Sabbath-Rest

God gives those who delight in the Sabbath a great promise:

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, IF YOU CALL THE SABBATH A DELIGHT AND THE LORD’S HOLY DAY HONORABLE, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, THEN YOU WILL FIND YOUR JOY IN THE LORD, and I WILL CAUSE YOU TO RIDE ON THE HEIGHTS OF THE LAND AND TO FEAST ON THE INHERITANCE OF YOUR FATHER JACOB.”

—Isaiah 58:13, 14.

This passage suggests the Sabbath is a doorway through which we can experience the best things in life: we “ride on the heights” and “feast on the inheritance.” People today are trampling over each other in the rush to “have it all.” Individuals are burning out and families are falling apart under the strain. But God presents the Sabbath as a much better way to get there—to the good life—from here.

Let’s look at some of the specific benefits of Sabbath rest.

“In our culture, work has become a god. It is the pre-eminent factor in organizing human life and establishing personal identities. It so dominates people’s lives that there is little time for themselves or their families. The Sabbath is God’s answer. It serves as a counterbalance, establishing the inalienable human right to rest. It is designed to protect us from the dangers of physical exhaustion, psychological stress and the interpersonal alienation which result from idolization and over-identification with work.”—Richard Exley, *The Rhythm of Life* (Tulsa. Okla.: Honor Books, 1987), p.73.

1. The Sabbath is a memorial of creation, and by keeping it holy, we erect a memorial to our Creator. Its sacred hours offer a wonderful opportunity to get in touch with our roots in God’s created world. When was the last time you or your family took time to really soak in the quiet beauty of a forest path or rocky stream? It’s harder to really hear or see nature these days; there’s so much else drowning out its peaceful sounds and sights. The Sabbath gives us a space in which to catch glimpses of God again in the midst of the wonders He has made for us.

2. On Sabbath we experience the joy of worship and fellowship with other Christians. The Sabbath points us heavenward. We desperately need this weekly perspective adjustment. And we need to look up together. There’s a benefit from praising God with others as a group of worshipers, and that benefit simply doesn’t come any other way. We need to express our faith publicly, and socially, as well as in the privacy of our hearts. The Sabbath gives us that special time of coming together as a church body to recharge our spiritual batteries.

Isaiah understood the joy of Sabbath worship.

“Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the SABBATH without desecrating it. . . and who hold[s] fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain AND GIVE THEM JOY IN MY HOUSE OF PRAYER, . . . for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

—Isaiah 56:2, 6-7.

3. The Sabbath provides occasions to perform thoughtful acts of kindness. Has a neighbor been sick during the week when you had no time to visit? When a friend needed a sympathetic ear after her husband's death, did the pressure of daily living deprive her of your loving attention? Our natural inclination is to keep postponing these things. The Sabbath says, "Just do it." Or as Jesus advised, "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12).

4. The Sabbath is a day to strengthen family ties. When Christ commanded, "On it [the Sabbath] you shall not do any work" (Exodus 20:10), He couldn't have given a better prescription to workaholic dads and stressed-out moms. The Sabbath is a giant STOP sign for families. Stop rushing past each other; stop letting the most urgent things crowd out the most important things. The Sabbath is one day when we can replace entertainment with interaction, pressure with prayer, labor with laughter, busy schedules with quiet reflection. Sabbath-rest provides the entire family with the time to link up with Christ and tap into His spiritual energy.

5. The Sabbath is a time when Jesus comes especially near. Every relationship needs time, quality time, and our relationship with Christ is no exception. Devoting a whole day to Christ each week is a great way to keep our friendship with Him fresh and exciting. The Sabbath gives us extra time for Bible study and prayer, extra time to simply be alone with Christ in a quiet place and listen. Jesus "blessed the seventh day and made it holy" with the promise of His presence (Genesis 2:3). You can understand why it is important to observe Saturday, the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath, because it is the day Christ set apart at creation to communicate with us in a special way.

When Jesus created the Sabbath it almost seems that He had our generation in mind. It's exactly what we need in our stress-filled environment: a day that is truly a break—a complete break from everything else. A day to worship God, get in touch with creation again, and concentrate on relationships instead of things. The Sabbath is a breath of fresh air in today's smoggy, non-stop freeway of life.

A Foretaste Of Heavenly Rest

We can sum up the benefits of linking up with Jesus through a daily and a weekly encounter in one word—rest. The word “Sabbath” comes from a Hebrew word that means rest, so it’s not surprising that the Scripture calls the seventh day “a Sabbath of rest” (Leviticus 23:3). It serves as a foretaste of the perfect rest we’ll experience in heaven.

“[God] has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ . . . THERE REMAINS, THEN, A SABBATH-REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest.”

—Hebrews 4:4, 9-11.

Experiencing “Sabbath-rest” gives us a weekly hint of the joy we will experience in the eternal rest of heaven. This rest isn’t just inactivity, it refers to the sense of security, peace and well-being that lie at the root of the truly abundant life. This kind of spiritual rest can be appreciated only through experience, and the testimony of those who have experienced salvation-rest and Sabbath-rest is universal: If you enter into the rest of Jesus through a daily and weekly connection with Him, you will discover the greatest joy in life.

Our Lord Himself gave us the Sabbath at creation. It was not given to the Jews, but to the entire human race, two thousand years before there was a Jewish people. Jesus “blessed” and “sanctified” the Sabbath. It is a special day set aside by God for renewing our spiritual life. It is part of His Ten Commandment law. God said “remember,” but most of the world has forgotten. Would you like to thank Jesus for His gift of rest?



Would you like to tell Him you desire to keep His Sabbath each week? Would you like to say, “Yes Lord! I desire to find delight in the day You have established.” Why not make that commitment right now:

Dear Heavenly Father: I thank You for the promise of salvation-rest each day to meet the challenges of life, and for the promise of Sabbath-rest each week to cement my relationship with You. I thank You for the promise of power from above to change my heart and give me right desires and motives. Please make me loyal to the Saviour, who gave up everything so I could experience life in all its fullness. Make me responsive to Your will. Help me always to welcome the opportunity to experience heavenly rest. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[You may be wondering: Who changed the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week? When was the change made? Did God authorize the change? These questions will be answered in guide 21.]

Lesson **17** **DISCOVER** *online* The Secret of Growth Through Sharing

- **We Grow by Sharing**
- **We Share Christ by How We Live**
- **We Share Christ by How We Act**
- **We Share Christ by What We Wear**
- **We Share Christ by How We Give**



The Secret Of Growth Through Sharing

Larry was enjoying pleasant conversation, Japanese tea, and rice crackers at Mr. Komori's house when the other guests began taking out their Bibles. They all looked at him expectantly. "Could you please give us our study now?" Mr. Komori asked politely.

Larry almost choked on his tea. He'd thought this get-together was just to have fun. And now he couldn't think of a thing to say.

Larry had actually taught many Bible classes at the Christian English language school in Japan where he worked. But they were all well-planned. He could give out information on the Bible with ease. But to just talk about God spontaneously . . . that was different.

Larry had heard all the Bible stories since childhood. But they meant very little to him on a personal basis. He'd been doing things He knew were wrong in God's eyes. So he kept his distance. How could he talk to others about a God he himself didn't really know?

Now, sitting there on the sofa, surrounded by expectant people, his charade was about to collapse. In that moment of fear, a verse flashed into his mind, something about the Holy Spirit giving us words to say when we are brought before people to give witness (Luke 12:12). He uttered a desperate prayer for help and latched onto the most familiar story he could think of: the Prodigal Son.

As he described how much God loves even those who wander away from Him, Larry found himself speaking straight from the heart. His words were sinking in. For the first time in his life Larry realized how much God loved him.

That night Larry knelt by his bed and committed his life to a God who'd finally become real. Sharing God's love had made it much more than just a familiar abstraction. It was now a fact that overwhelmed him.

Jesus Challenges Us to Grow by Sharing

As Jesus was about to return to heaven, He commissioned the disciples to be His personal representatives:

“YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES . . . to the ends of the earth.”

—**Acts 1:8.** (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

The disciples had spent three-and-a-half years taking in Christ’s words and actions, and finally His death and resurrection.

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.”

—**Acts 2:32.**

When Christ’s followers gave their hearts unreservedly to Him at Pentecost, the risen Christ transformed their lives through the power of the Spirit. They became witnesses, not only to Christ’s bodily resurrection and ascension, but also to His resurrection power that had changed their lives.

As Christians we are also witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus because we have experienced His renewing power in our own lives.

“But because of his great love for us, GOD, who is rich in mercy, MADE US ALIVE WITH CHRIST even WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN TRANSGRESSIONS—it is by grace you have been saved. AND GOD RAISED US UP WITH CHRIST and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, IN ORDER THAT... HE MIGHT SHOW THE INCOMPARABLE RICHES OF HIS GRACE, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

—**Ephesians 2:4-7.**

We have been made alive with Christ, so we can demonstrate the riches of His grace. Jesus asks His followers to take the good news of what He can do in a human life to all the world, and He promises to go with us as we do so.

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..., teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, to the very end of the age.”

—**Matthew 28:19-20.**

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“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . , teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, to the very end of the age.”

—**Matthew 28:19-20.**

As ambassadors of the gospel, we are “entrusted with the secret things of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). It is a privilege to help pass on the power of the gospel. H.M.S. Richards, the founder of the Voice of Prophecy radio ministry, once wrote:

“I have seen the change in the hearts of people who have heard the gospel of Christ. I have traveled in lands where the name of God and of Christ was never known until His church took the gospel there. I have seen these people changed from filth to cleanliness, from disease to health, from constant fear of evil spirits to joy in Christian living. I have seen the change in the status of womanhood. I have seen true Christian homes emerge from pagan darkness. In every land that I have visited I have seen lives changed. I know that ‘the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation’ (Romans 1:16, KJV.) I know that when the church proclaims the gospel message, changes take place in human hearts and in human homes, and they are visible in the lives of those who respond to its appeal.”

We all have a part to play in this exciting work. God has given to us weak human beings a special role, because sharing is a vital part of our growth. In order for faith to remain healthy, it must be expressed. As Larry discovered so dramatically, talking about God helps make Him real for us too. The act of expressing our faith helps us experience it more fully. *Witnessing helps us grow.*

Besides sharing verbally with people, here are some other ways we can witness:

We Share Christ by the Way We Live

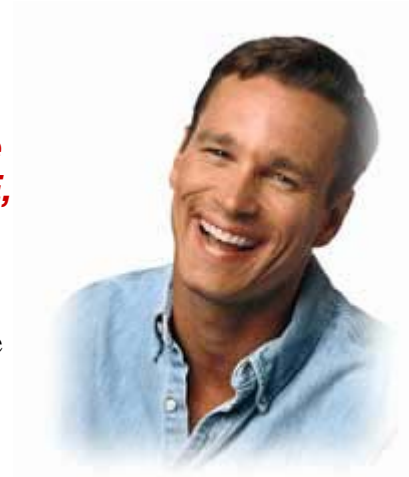
A young man who'd grown up in an abusive home once observed: "I looked at my parents who by their example gave me a distorted image of God; I never had the example of someone with skin on who loves me." People around us desperately need someone who will give them a healthy picture of God. They need someone "with skin on" who will demonstrate godly qualities.

Our most powerful sermon is often simply the way we live. Before a person cares how much you know, they must know how much you care. Peter urges us:

"LIVE SUCH GOOD LIVES among the pagans [non-Christians] that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND GLORIFY GOD on the day he visits us. . . . To this you were called, because CHRIST SUFFERED FOR YOU, LEAVING YOU AN EXAMPLE, THAT YOU SHOULD FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS."

—1 Peter 2:12, 21.

Since "Christ suffered" for us at Calvary, we have an example of sacrificial love very close at hand. That love, reproduced in us as loving acts to others, can become a powerful force drawing unbelievers into the arms of Christ.



We Share Christ by the Way We Think

Often it seems so easy for us to fall prey to the temptations of “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” But Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Why did He succeed where so many fail?

When the devil ambushed Jesus in the wilderness with his appeals to appetite, pride, and presumption, Jesus fought back successfully by quoting from Scripture (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Christ was prepared ahead of time because He had filled His mind with Bible truths. That’s where the battle is won or lost—in our minds. Usually we only think of resisting temptation after it has already saturated our thoughts and all but overwhelmed us. We’ll lose most of those battles. But we can be successful if we attack habits at their point of origin—in our thought patterns.

“For as [a person] thinketh in his heart, so is he.”
—Proverbs 23:7, KJV.

Growing Christians think heavenward. They know God is bigger than the problems around them. They concentrate on the healthy qualities they are trying to acquire rather than just the bad things they’re trying to avoid.

“Rejoice in the Lord always, . . . in everything, BY PRAYER and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is TRUE, whatever is NOBLE, whatever is RIGHT, whatever is PURE, whatever is LOVELY, whatever is ADMIRABLE—if anything is EXCELLENT or PRAISEWORTHY—think about such things . . . put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”
—Philippians 4:4, 6-9.

What we feed our minds makes all the difference. Garbage in, garbage out. God’s Word in, God’s life out.

We Share Christ by the Way We Look

As a representative of Christ, the Christian will be modest even about how he or she looks, avoiding all kinds of extremes. God says of the Christian:

“If any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over . . . when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, THE UNFADING BEAUTY OF A GENTLE AND QUIET SPIRIT, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way . . . [those] who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.”

—1 Peter 3:1-5.

“Dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for . . . [those] who profess to worship God.”

—1 Timothy 2:9-10.

Simplicity in dress and adornment has always marked genuine Christ-likeness. So Christians tend to avoid both faddish extremes and the peculiar garb of the fanatic. Simple good taste goes a long way. Ideally, others should be attracted to us not by the statement we make about fashion, but by the statement our lives make about Jesus.

“Blessed are the meek [humble], for they will inherit the earth.”

—Matthew 5:5.

We Share Christ by the Way We Act

The historian Edward Gibbon tells us that when Galerius sacked the camp of the Persians, a shining leather bag filled with pearls fell into the hands of a looting soldier. This man carefully preserved the useful bag—but threw away the precious pearls.

People who cling to whatever superficial thrills the world can offer up, while discarding Jesus, the Pearl of Great Price, and the eternal kingdom which Christ offers, are in even worse shape than the looting soldier. It's not just a fortune that can slip through our hands, but eternal salvation. So Scripture warns us:

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man [appetite] the lust of his eyes [love of the world] and the boasting of what he has and does [pride]—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

—1 John 2:15-17.

Satan works hard to gold-plate the most destructive sins and hype the worst habits. You would think sin had the world's greatest public relations program. Why do prostitutes on TV shows often seem so lovely and well-adjusted? We seldom see anyone who resembles the abused, scarred, sallow-faced creatures who walk the streets at night. Why do mostly young, beautiful, hard-working, satisfied, intensely happy people populate beer commercials? If it really “doesn't get any better than this,” what are they trying to numb with alcohol? We seldom see anyone who resembles those pathetic figures stumbling out of the liquor store with a paper sack in their hands.

The most destructive pleasures seem to have acquired the loudest voices and the most graphic images these days. We can't just buy whatever the world is selling. Christ asks us to be discriminating: “wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16, KJV).

We also have to be careful of associations that compromise our Christian principles:

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness.”

—2 Corinthians 6:14.

Christ does, of course, want us to keep reaching out to non-Christian friends. Personal relationships are the primary means through which faith is shared. Just make sure that your associates are not dragging you back into the old way of life. If you feel you need to hide your faith while in a certain relationship—something's wrong.

What we take into our lives, even the entertainment we choose, does have an impact on our spiritual life. We need to be conscious of what we're feeding our minds.

“I will set before my eyes no vile thing.”

—Psalm 101:3.

More and more of the entertainment around us seems bent toward the graphically violent and the sexually explicit. We live in an X-rated world. But there is still an enormous amount of excellent material out there that remains almost untouched. There is plenty in art and literature and music that explores profound truths and touches our deepest emotions. If we remain in a vacuum, the worst will flood in to fill it. This is especially true of our children. But if we feed our souls on the best, the worst won't be able to drag us down to its level.

Holding to higher standards in the things we let into our homes and minds won't narrow our lives. We'll be greatly broadened if we focus on all that is true, all that is admirable, all that is excellent. The Christian has more to make him happy than anyone else.

“You have made known to me the path of life; YOU WILL FILL ME WITH JOY in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

—Psalm 16:11.

We Share Christ by the Way We Give



As he was about to baptize a new believer, the late Pastor H.M.S. Richards noticed that the man still had a well-filled billfold in his pocket. Richards asked if he'd forgotten to leave his money in the dressing room. "My pocketbook and I will be baptized together," the man then explained. He had caught the true spirit of Christianity—giving to help others. Christians grow by giving, and that is why "Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

How do we make an investment in the bank of heaven?

"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 TREASURES IN HEAVEN . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

—Matthew 6:19-21.

Some people work a lifetime to amass a fortune—only to see it disappear in plummeting stock prices or business failures. But what we give to advance God's kingdom retains an eternal value.

How much of what we own really belongs to God?

"The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it."

—Psalm 24:1, 2.

"'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty."

—Haggai 2:8.

We belong to God both because He created us and because He rescued us from our sins, bought us with His blood.

"You are not your own; you were BOUGHT at a price."

—1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

How much of what we possess did God give us?

"He himself gives all men life and breath and EVERYTHING else."

—Acts 17:25.

"Remember the LORD your God, for it is HE who GIVES YOU THE ABILITY TO PRODUCE WEALTH."

—Deuteronomy 8:18.

The crucified and risen Lord invites us to share with Him in extending the gospel to others. How much does he ask us to give to finance that divine mission?

“‘Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.’ But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ ‘In TITHES AND OFFERINGS. . . . Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the LORD Almighty, and see if I WILL not THROW OPEN THE FLOODGATES OF HEAVEN and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.’”

—Malachi 3:8-10.

Tithe is a “tenth” of our “increase” (Deuteronomy 14:22, KJV; Genesis 28:22). For the farmer or merchant the increase is income after deducting business expenses. For the employee, it is the total wage. The principle of tithing is a moral principle because it involves character. By failing to tithe we “rob” God. It is as important for us to be honest in returning our tithe to God as we are in paying taxes to the government or in handling any other transaction.



When Jesus came to live among us, He found the Pharisees counting and tithing even tiny garden seeds. While He did not approve of their legalistic religion, He gave approval to tithing:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and the Pharisees, you hypocrites! YOU GIVE A TENTH of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law —justice, mercy and faithfulness. YOU SHOULD HAVE PRACTICED THE LATTER, WITHOUT NEGLECTING THE FORMER.”

—Matthew 23:23.

The tithe belongs to God and is to be used exclusively for supporting Christ’s ministry and finishing His work on earth so He can return.

“The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”

—1 Corinthians 9:14.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

—Matthew 24:14.

How much should we give in “offerings”?

“A generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. EACH MAN SHOULD GIVE WHAT HE HAS DECIDED IN HIS HEART to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER.”

—2 Corinthians 9:5-7.

Offerings are a matter of individual decision. They are used for financing the spread of the gospel in addition to the tithe which is used exclusively to support the gospel ministry.

God's plan for systematic giving aids both the spread of the gospel and our own Christian growth. Jesus promises you:

“Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.”

—Luke 6:38.

Believers have proven over and over that you can't out-give God.

H.M.S. Richards once related this experience:

“A lifelong gambler attended my meetings in Los Angeles, and I shall never forget the time I talked with him alone in the rear of the auditorium. He took a roll of bills from his pocket, \$500, and gave them all to me, saying, ‘This is my first tithe.’

“The man was not well, and he had done nothing but gamble for 30 or 40 years, so I said, ‘How are you going to live?’

“He replied, ‘I have only five or six dollars left, but this other belongs to God.’

“Then I asked, ‘What will you do?’

“‘I don’t know,’ he answered, ‘but I know that I must pay my tithe to God, and He will take care of me.’

“And God certainly did. The man’s repentance was sincere. He went all the way in his consecration and was happy in his Christian life. And God provided for him to the day of his death.”

God does not promise that all faithful believers will grow rich. But we have the assurance that our Maker will supply life’s necessities. Christ gave everything for us. Let’s give our hearts completely to Him now. Discover the joy of sharing Christ with others and of growing in His wonderful grace.

Dear Father: I thank You for Your promise of joyful living. Thank You for Your grace and Your love which enable me to grow. Help me share You in the way I live, give, and act. May I always let Jesus live His perfect life in me. Keep me ready until Jesus comes. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.



Lesson **18**
The Secret of
a Healthy Lifestyle

DISCOVER
online

- Pure Air
- Exercise
- Proper Diet
- Avoid Things Harmful
- Trust In Divine Power



The Secret Of A Healthy Lifestyle



Contemporary researchers have taken pains to document a truth which the Bible first established: human beings are an integrated whole. What we often divide into the physical, mental, social, and spiritual parts of a person are really interrelated and inseparable. In other words, what affects the mind, affects the body. Our spiritual condition has an impact on our physical condition, and vice versa. What affects one aspect of our being also touches all the others. We are a whole person.

For example, researchers Dr. Lee S. Berk of Loma Linda University and Dr. William F. Fry of Stanford University found in controlled studies that happy, joyful laughter produces measurable changes in a person's immune system (*Loma Linda Scope*, July-September, 1992, p. 55). You can actually help your body fight disease better by being happy! This and several other studies show how closely the mind and body work together.

Thousands of years ago God's Word pointed out this vital connection which has only recently been accepted into medical theory:

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”

—Proverbs 17:22. (*Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].*)

According to the apostle John, how closely related are the mind and body to our spiritual well being?

“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”

—3 John 2.

The Word of God can save your life in more ways than one. It can serve as our fountain of health, as well as our fountain of eternal life. So in this guide we'll look at several essential health principles.

Since physical and mental health and our spiritual well-being go hand-in-hand, Paul makes the following strong appeal to the Christian:

“Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

—1 Corinthians 10:31.

The gospel includes both physical and spiritual restoration. The Creator wants us to “enjoy good health” (3 John 2). He knows that a healthful lifestyle can help us be vibrant Christians. How can we build up and maintain good health? Here are eight principles to follow if you really want to live a healthier and more productive life.

Pure Air

Pure, fresh air is essential to good health. During the day and while sleeping at night, proper ventilation of our home and workplace insures that our blood will always distribute enough oxygen to every part of the body.

The kind of air we breathe is obviously important. Be careful that you're not subjecting yourself to fumes, gases or air-borne bacteria from some hidden source. Taking deep breaths during an early morning walk is a great way to oxygenate your body—as long as you can walk where the air is clean.

Smoking not only pollutes the air, but is also one of today's big killers. Scientific research has established a causal relationship between tobacco and lung cancer, emphysema, heart disease, and other ills. The body's addiction to the nicotine in cigarettes makes smoking one of the hardest habits to break. If present trends continue, smoking will kill 12 million people a year by the year 2020.

Sunlight

“The benefits of sunlight are many:

“1. Fifteen to 30 minutes of daily exposure to sunlight in the early morning or late afternoon helps the body synthesize or make its own vitamin D, an essential nutrient/hormone in the skin. (Vitamin D helps blood to produce calcium and phosphorus, which build and repair bone mass.)

“2. Sunlight acts as a disinfectant and a killer of bacteria and germs.

“3. Being in the sun after a plane trip that crosses several time zones is helpful in adjusting to jet lag.

“4. The sun provides energy [by which the plant kingdom can] convert carbon dioxide and water into carbohydrates. . . . Without this process animals and humans would starve to death.’—Eleanor N. Whitney and Eva M. Hamilton, *Understanding Nutrition* (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Company, 1981), p. 401.

“5. Sunlight also helps a person adjust to night work and relieves depression related to dark days where winter occurs.

“(A word of caution: Sunlight can also be harmful. Prolonged exposure can burn skin, increase the risk of skin cancer, speed up the aging process, damage the eyes, and cause cataracts).”—*Look Up and Live: A Guide to Health Quarterly* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, January to March, 1993), p. 36.

Rest

We've grown quite impatient about health. We want a pill that will block the pain or relieve the symptoms so that we can keep on with our accustomed pace. But the body must have rest in order to repair itself. And the medications we take can only assist in the body's work of restoration. Often, the symptoms we're trying so hard to get rid of are really the body's efforts to fight disease. Fever, congestion, and tiredness are all evidence that the body is working hard to cure you. So let it do its work.

Rest. Rest is nature's best remedy for the abuse our mind and body often take during the day. We must have time for recreation and rest to relieve the tensions of work and family responsibilities. Without their required dosage of rest, people often experience anxiety, depression, and irritability. This can lead to illness, which will force us to take the rest our bodies were asking for all along. There's simply no substitute for a good night's sleep. No kind of medication or stimulation can make up for a lack of sleep.

Recharging our spiritual batteries on a daily basis is also important to physical health. A Christian's daily time of meditation, Bible study, and prayer will heal the body as well as the soul. We also need a regular break from the work cycle, a weekly day of rest, and annual or semi-annual vacations that provide a good change of pace.

Exercise

Look Up and Live: A Guide to Health, page 38, has this to say about exercise:

"God appointed Adam and Eve to do work that involved exercising the body. Unfortunately, many of us today have work that involves a minimal amount of movement. Yet the fact that exercise is vital to our health has not changed. Here are only some of the things it can do for us:

"1. Exercise helps to normalize blood pressure.

"2. Exercise allows more blood to reach all parts of the body, keeping the extremities warm.

"3. Exercise releases both physical and emotional tension helping you to feel better about life. [Exercise is usually the best remedy for worry and stress.]

"4. Exercise provides electrical energy to the brain and nerve cells. [It promotes health by stimulating the immune system. When the body is kept in tone by proper exercise, the mind thinks more creatively and efficiently.]

"5. It can help with your complexion and keep you trim.

"6. Exercise makes you more energetic, thus delaying both physical and emotional fatigue.

"7. It aids in the brain's production of a chemical that gives you a sense of well-being and increases your tolerance for pain.

"This partial list should convince us that it is time to stop making excuses and start exercising. Start slowly and gradually increase as you gain endurance. It may be wise to consult your physician before starting. High blood pressure and cholesterol often do not manifest symptoms, but can prove harmful when starting an exercise program. Your goal should be to engage in any type of aerobic exercise or recreation that is comparable to walking one mile in 15 minutes four or more times a week. (Aerobic exercises repeatedly use the large muscles of the legs and arms until the heart rate increases 20 to 25 percent)."

Water

Since water is essential to every cell in the body, we should drink plenty of it. It is nature's solvent, the one perfect medium for cleansing both inside and out.

"Water has existed since the beginning of Creation and is an important factor in keeping our bodies running smoothly:

"1. By weight the body is about 70 percent water.

"2. Blood is approximately 83 percent water, and bones consist of nearly 22 percent water.

"3. Water comprises approximately 75 percent of the body's muscles.

"4. The body requires about two and one half quarts of water per day to perform all of its functions. Some of these functions include blood circulation, waste removal, nutrient transport, and digestion. (We obtain water both by drinking it and from the food we eat.)

"5. The average person has between 15 and 40 billion brain cells. Each one of those is 70 to 85 percent water. Sufficient water to supply these cells helps keep you mentally alert and helps prevent depression and irritability.

"6. It is not only the water you drink that is important. A cool or tepid daily bath or shower improves circulation, thus energizing the body and mind. A shower or bath can also soothe jangled nerves, which can cause illness by weakening the immune system. Bathing also removes impurities from the skin and can reduce fever."—Ibid., p. 35.

Proper Diet

At creation God instructed Adam and Eve to eat a diet of nuts, grains, and fruits (Genesis 1:29). After Adam and Eve sinned, vegetables were added to their diet (Genesis 3:18). After the flood, the Creator added “clean” flesh foods to the diet (Genesis 7:2, 3; 9:1-6).

Because people on a vegetarian diet are healthier and live longer, many experts in nutrition and health urge us to consider returning to humanity’s original diet of nuts, grains, and fruits with vegetables added. The flesh of animals contains both saturated fat and cholesterol, which can increase the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, cancer, obesity, diabetes, and other diseases. Today many physicians and nutritionists advise those who do eat meat to consume only lean, well-cooked meat and to do so sparingly. If you’d like to start a vegetarian menu, make sure you first understand how to provide a balanced diet without meat.

Here are some helpful suggestions for preparing a vegetarian diet or a diet with limited meat (taken from *Look Up and Live*, page 44):

“1. Purchase the freshest and best-quality fruits, nuts, grains, and vegetables available. Then store them in a cool, dry place for a short amount of time.

“2. Eat some raw food every day. When you do cook, use a minimum amount of water and time.

“3. Stay away from as many refined foods as possible. Buy or make breads with whole-grain cereal flour, and use brown rice instead of white. Your intake of such starches and complex carbohydrates should consist of six or more servings a day. (This also includes seeds and legumes.)

“4. Try to eat five or more servings (one half cup) of fruits and vegetables every day. Green and yellow vegetables, along with citrus fruits, are especially important. Also try to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables as they come into their season.

“5. Replace your intake of animal fats (butter, cream, lard, suet, etc.) with vegetable fats.” Your total fat intake should be less than 30 per cent of your total calories.”

The above diet of fully fortified alternatives is adequate without meat if you use low-fat dairy products. If your diet does include meat, eat only lean meats and fish.

A healthful diet includes eating simple, attractive, well prepared foods at regular intervals. Eating between meals and overeating—especially fats, sweets, and rich foods—can lead to being overweight and to several degenerative diseases as well.

Drinking a lot of liquids with meals slows digestion, so when you drink with your meals, do it sparingly. Some spices and rich greasy foods irritate the stomach. Beverages containing caffeine can cause ulcers, an acid stomach, heartburn, anxiety, and depression.

Those who choose to eat meat as a part of their diet, should eat only the meats that the Bible indicates are “clean,” or fit for humans to eat. When God gave people permission to eat meat after the flood (Genesis 7:2, 3; 9:1-6), He made clear which animals were clean and could be eaten, and which animals were unclean.



Read in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 the list of birds, beasts, and fish God pronounced unfit for food. According to these chapters, clean fish must have both fins and scales. Scavenger birds are prohibited. Clean animals must divide, or split the hoof and also chew the cud. An example of an unclean animal is the pig.

“The pig is also unclean; although it has a split hoof, it does not chew the cud. You are not to eat their meat or touch their carcasses.”

—Deuteronomy 14:8.

Scientific research substantiates that God is indeed right in His warning against eating unclean meats. The health concerns are valid. Not only are there diseases in some animals but the effects of saturated fat on the human body is well documented. It is important to cook all red meat, poultry and fish at the recommended temperatures in order to kill the disease causing bacteria. God’s desire is for His people to live happy, healthy, and productive lives. Why? Because He cares about you.

Avoid Things Harmful

What warnings does the Bible give about alcoholic beverages?

“Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.”
—Proverbs 20:1.

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine.”—Proverbs 23:29-30.

“Nor thieves nor the greedy nor DRUNKARDS nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”
—1 Corinthians 6:10.

Look Up and Live: A Guide to Health, page 66, has these observations about alcohol: “Just one or two alcoholic drinks decreases the brain’s ability to gather information . . . impairs memory, perception, and judgment. Alcohol affects the following bodily systems:

“1. The immune system—Alcohol decreases the white cells’ ability to fight disease, thus increasing the risk of pneumonia, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and several cancers.

“2. The endocrine system—Only 2 or 3 alcoholic drinks per day increase the risk of miscarriages, stillbirths, and premature births.

“3. The circulatory system—The use of alcohol increases the risk of coronary heart disease, reduces blood sugar, and elevates blood fats and blood pressure, thus increasing hypertension.

“4. The digestive system—Alcohol irritates the stomach, thereby causing gastric bleeding. . . . Habitual use of alcohol raises the risk of fatty liver, hepatitis, and cirrhosis of the liver.”

Alcohol is responsible for 30 percent of all suicides; 55 percent of all auto deaths; 60 percent of all child abuse; and 85 percent of all home violence (Kathleen Whalen Fitzgerald, *Alcoholism* (New York: Doubleday, 1988, p. xii).

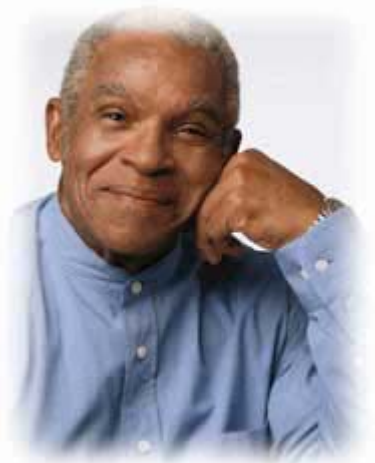
In a letter to *Christianity Today*, Richard Cizik reminds us, “Alcohol is the nation’s number-one drug problem, accounting for \$100 billion in economic costs and 105,000 deaths each year. It kills more than three times as many Americans as crack, heroin, and all other drugs combined.”

Trust In Divine Power

These seven principles outline the elements of a healthful lifestyle, but they are incomplete without an eighth vital principle—trust in divine power. A person haunted by fear or guilt will find it hard to benefit fully from the health practices we’ve just described. But a person enjoying a positive faith in God will find that everything works together for abundant living. Remember the ultimate source of well-being:

“Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and HEALS ALL YOUR DISEASES, who REDEEMS YOUR LIFE from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.”

—Psalm 103:2-4.



David Larson, a consultant to the National Institute of Mental Health, did extensive research on the relationship between religion and health. His study demonstrated a direct connection between a Christian commitment and health. He was rather surprised to learn that those who attend church live longer than those who don’t. Church-goers have a reduced incidence of heart attack, hardening of the arteries, high blood pressure, and other diseases. Larson also found that those who have faith in God live more productive lives because they are less likely to be depressed, to become alcoholics, to be jailed as repeat offenders, or to be trapped in an unhappy marriage.

Health is more than just an absence of disease. It results from the harmonious development of the physical, mental, social, and spiritual parts of our nature. Trust in divine power is the keystone to genuine well-being and a healthy and happy life.

Those who follow the eight health principles described in this guide experience not only a longer life, but also a much better quality of life. An ongoing research project by the Department of Preventive Medicine at Loma Linda University has documented what happens when a segment of the population follows these principles: “Approximately 50,000 Seventh-day Adventists were studied, primarily in California, over 30 years. Results showed that Adventist men live 8.9 years longer and women 7.5 years longer than the general population.”—John Sharffenberg, M.D., M.P.H., *Vibrant Life* (May/June 1992), p. 18. This physician also points out that studies of Adventists in Holland, Norway, and Poland show similar results.

Researchers attribute the longer life-span of Adventists to their following some or all of the eight health principles outlined in this guide.

Studies have shown that Mormons also have one of the lowest rates of heart disease. They don’t smoke, drink, or use beverages containing caffeine.

Applying the Bible’s perspective to our lives does make a difference—in all kinds of practical ways; offering convincing evidence that Christianity is the most practical, reasonable religion in all the world. It changes people—their thinking and their actions—and creates a new lifestyle.

Because of the close relationship between the mind, the body, and our spiritual life, Christians who live by the Word of God will want to follow the principles of a healthful lifestyle as they prepare for Jesus’ second coming (John 10:10, 1 John 3:1-3). Christ not only wants us to be ready to meet Him when He returns, He also wants to improve the quality of our present lives. We can cooperate with Him in doing that by following God’s basic health principles.

Jesus promises to deliver us from every destructive habit through His “power at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20). If you need help in overcoming some body-destroying habit such as using tobacco or alcohol, here is a prayer for you:

Dear Father in heaven: I want so much to live as Jesus lived, in holiness and purity. Give me Your grace to surrender every harmful thing in my life. I just can't pull it off through my own willpower. You know how often my best resolutions have turned into ropes of sand. But you have promised Your power will “work within us.” I love You and want to be like You and to be ready when Jesus comes again. Please give me strength to overcome my bad habits and to live for You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Lesson **19**
Entering
the Christian Life

DISCOVER
online

- What Is the Meaning of Baptism?
- Why Should I Be Baptized?
- The Importance of Baptism
- Baptism Is Only the Beginning
- A Cause for Rejoicing



Entering the Christian Life

One of our Bible school representatives in Africa recently sent us this report: “Five years ago I received a request from the Voice of Prophecy to visit a prisoner who was a Bible correspondence school student. I presented the request to the prison authorities, who graciously gave permission. Because the student had a deep desire to delve into the Bible, I visited him regularly.

“About six months after my initial visit, the student-prisoner asked to be baptized and join the church. The authorities agreed to provide facilities so the baptism could take place in the prison. The wardens and other prisoners gathered to witness one of the most moving baptisms I have ever conducted.

“Shortly after this, our brother was released from jail, even though he still had considerable time to serve. When I asked why, I was told that his life had changed so drastically, and he was such a witness for his Saviour and his religion that he could no longer be thought of as a prisoner, nor be treated as such. This man was united with his family and is now a leader in one of our large congregations.”

What Is the Meaning of Baptism?

When this prisoner became a Christian and his life completely changed, why was it important for him to be baptized? The Bible makes clear the importance and true meaning of baptism. In a conversation with Nicodemus, the community leader who came to Jesus by night, Jesus declared:



“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

—**John 3:3.** *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

Nicodemus didn’t grasp just what Christ meant. After all, how can a person be “born again”? So Jesus explained:

“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

—**John 3:5.**

“Born of . . . the Spirit” signifies entering a new life, undergoing a change of mind and heart. Because entering the kingdom of God involves a completely new kind of existence, not just an old life patched up, it is called the new birth. Being born of the Spirit is important, and water baptism is the outward symbolic portrayal of this inward change. Our representative baptized the prisoner as a recognition of his commitment to Christ and as a symbol of the transformation the Holy Spirit had begun in his character.

Why Should I Be Baptized?

Our salvation revolves around three of Christ's great acts:

“Christ DIED for our sins according to the Scriptures, . . . he was BURIED, . . . he was RAISED on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

—1 Corinthians 15:3, 4.

Christ made salvation possible through His death, burial, and resurrection. He died for our sins, was buried, then rose from the grave to give us a new life of righteousness.

“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH? We were therefore BURIED WITH HIM THROUGH BAPTISM into death in order that, JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD through the glory of the Father, WE TOO MAY LIVE A NEW LIFE.”

—Romans 6:3, 4.

The act of being baptized shows that, in a way, we can actually participate in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism means that we have died with Christ, and have buried the old life of sin with Christ, and that we are rising to “live a new life” in Christ. We can benefit from those saving acts just as if we’d been there on Mount Calvary and at the Garden Tomb.

Christ's death and resurrection becomes our death and resurrection. That's true, first of all, in terms of our relationship with God. God looks on us as we are in Christ—His blood covers our sins, His perfect life covers our inadequacy. Second, it's true in terms of our experience. God can make us dead to sin—as if we'd been crucified. He can make us alive to the things of the Spirit—as if we'd been resurrected from spiritual death.

The physical act of baptism graphically represents the steps of conversion. *First*, we're lowered into the water, we're immersed completely—just as people who have died are lowered into the grave and covered. This indicates that we have died with Christ and have buried our old lifestyle. Baptism is a funeral, a formal farewell to an existence in which sin dominated. *Then*, we're lifted up out of the water by the one baptizing—just like a person being resurrected from the grave. This says that we're a “new creation,” completely given to the “new life” God has waiting for us.

Only immersion can accurately illustrate the true meaning of baptism—death, burial, and rebirth. “Baptism” by sprinkling doesn't adequately symbolize the new birth.

What does it really mean to die with Christ?

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with [rendered powerless, margin] that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

—Romans 6:6.

Baptism represents outwardly what a person must do inside: surrender everything to Christ, lay it all out on the table. If we keep anything a secret, if we hold anything back from God, then we'll likely remain “slaves to sin” in some way. It's a good idea, as you prepare for baptism, to take a personal inventory and ask God to work in and with you to change anything that He wants you to change. Our transformation will not happen all at once. But we must be willing to put our whole selves in His hands. When we surrender fully to Christ, our sinful desires are “rendered powerless.”

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but CHRIST LIVES IN ME. The life I live in the body, I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

—Galatians 2:20.

When I identify with Christ’s crucifixion through baptism, I invite a powerful force into my life—“Christ lives in me.” The cross and the empty tomb are supernatural events—they still make things happen.

In order to arouse your will to put your life fully in Christ’s hands, first look at Christ dying on the cross. Don’t look at the sin that’s threatening you in order to beef up your will; don’t look at your past record and moan; look to Jesus. If you look carefully and prayerfully, you’ll be inspired. After admiring Christ’s gracious and courageous act of will on Calvary, you can express solidarity with Him: “By the power of the cross I claim that I am dead to these habits and responsive to God. I make my stand with Christ. From now on I will ‘live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.’”

As we tap into the power of Christ’s death and resurrection we’ll see more and more of His good qualities replacing our old habits:

“Therefore, if anyone is IN CHRIST, he is A NEW CREATION; the OLD has gone, the NEW has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.”

—2 Corinthians 5:17, 18.

Baptism is the first formal step in this process. Through it we express our desire to lock arms with Jesus and live a new and better life “in Christ.” Jesus does in us and through us what we could never do for ourselves. We arise from the water “a new creation,” and He gives us the power to live a “new” kind of life.

“No condemnation now hangs over the head of those who are ‘in’ Jesus Christ. For the new spiritual principle of life ‘in’ Christ lifts me out of the old vicious circle of sin and death.”

—Romans 8:1, 2. (The New Testament in Modern English, Phillips translation, Copyright © J. B. Phillips 1958, The Macmillan Company, New York.)

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

Remember that baptism not only symbolizes dying to an old life of sin, it also portrays the washing away of our sins by the blood of Jesus. At Pentecost, Peter told those who were seeking release from guilt:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

—Acts 2:38.

This brings up a question. Jesus never committed a single sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Why, then, did He permit Himself to be baptized?

“Then JESUS CAME from Galilee TO THE JORDAN TO BE BAPTIZED by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ Then John consented. AS SOON AS JESUS WAS BAPTIZED, HE WENT UP OUT OF THE WATER. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”

—Matthew 3:13-17.

Jesus was sinless. He didn’t need to repent of any wrongdoing or have any guilt washed away. Christ was baptized for another reason: “to fulfil all righteousness.” By allowing John to immerse Him in the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus set a positive example for us. He identified Himself fully with weak, sinful human beings; He was willing to take all the steps THEY needed to take. Christ the Saviour never asks His followers to go anywhere He hasn’t been. He’s always leading, never pushing. So when believers are immersed in the waters of baptism, they are following in the steps of the Master.

Through Christ’s death and resurrection He gives us His righteousness.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

—2 Corinthians 5:21.

Transformed in God’s eyes from sinners into saints, we grow into that righteousness which is already our gift, and thus we live a new life in Christ. Through Christ’s birth and baptism He took His first step of inviting humanity into His life. The Saviour’s death and resurrection were His final, climactic steps.

Why Should I Be Immersed?

All the evidence suggests that Christ was immersed at His baptism; He was not sprinkled with water, nor was water simply poured over His head. One reason John baptized Him in the Jordan River was “because there was PLENTY OF WATER” (John 3:23). When Jesus came to John for baptism, He went down into the water, and “as soon as Jesus was baptized [immersed], he went UP OUT OF THE WATER” (Matthew 3:16).

When we understand the true *meaning* of baptism, we have little difficulty recognizing the authentic *form* of baptism. The very word “baptize” comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, and means to dip or immerse (put under).

During John Wesley’s visit to America in 1737, a church jury of thirty-four men tried him on the strange charge of “refusing to baptize Mr. Parker’s child, except by dipping.” (The record of the trial appears in the court proceedings of the state of Georgia.) It’s evident that the father of Methodism baptized his converts by immersion.

The history of the early church makes clear that baptism meant immersion to them. Statements by the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Vol. VII, p. 379; and Vol. III, p. 94.) show that the church immersed baptismal candidates in the second and third centuries. Baptistries for immersing converts appear in many of the churches which were built between the fourth and fourteenth centuries in Europe and Asia. The reformer John Calvin stated: “The very word baptize, however, signifies to immerse; and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient Church.”—*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. 4, Chap. 15, Sec. 19.

Dean Stanley, one of the most scholarly writers of the Church of England, declared that “for the first thirteen centuries, the almost universal practice of baptism was that of which we read in the New Testament, and which is the very meaning of the word ‘baptize’—that those who were baptized were plunged, submerged, immersed into the water.”—*Christian Institutions*, p. 21.

Baptistries throughout Europe testify to the truthfulness of these statements—churches like the cathedral in Pisa, Italy, and St John’s, the second largest church in Rome. The cathedral in Frejus, France has a well-preserved baptistry that was built and used in the fifth century. The ruins of a second century church at Ephesus in Asia Minor also contains a baptistry for immersing candidates.

It was not until the Council of Ravenna early in the fifteenth century that the Catholic Church accepted sprinkling as equally valid with immersion. In questions of church practice, we are not to follow what any man teaches, but we are to follow the example of Christ and the apostles as closely as possible (Colossians 2:8).

What about the baptism of infants? Many sincere Christians cherish the tradition of infant baptism; it has become a way in which they dedicate their children to Christ. Giving our children to God from the very beginning is certainly commendable, but there are biblically acceptable ways in which we can dedicate our children to Christ.

Baptism, however, serves a very specific function in the New Testament. The Bible makes it clear that a person must be taught the way of salvation before baptism (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, KJV, NIV), that a person must believe in Jesus before being baptized (Acts 8:37), and that a person must repent of sin and be forgiven before being baptized (Acts 2:38). A baby is incapable of believing and of repentance and confession, all of which must precede baptism.

The Bible doesn’t give specific information about children who die before they are mature enough to choose Christ as their personal Saviour and be baptized. But we do know that children will be saved in the kingdom (Isaiah 11:6). And we can certainly trust the future of deceased infants to the Saviour who said:

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

—Matthew 19:14.

The Importance of Baptism

How important is it for believers to be immersed? Jesus admonished Nicodemus, “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). According to Jesus, “being born of water and the Spirit” is essential for those who wish to enter heaven.

Jesus gives only one exception. The thief on the cross was “born of the Spirit,” even though it was impossible for him to leave the cross and be immersed in water as a sign of his change of heart. Jesus promised him that he would be with Him in the kingdom (Luke 23:42, 43). For the thief, being “born of water and of the Spirit” represents the cleansing blood of Jesus which at that very moment was being spilt to cleanse the thief from his sins. Augustine observed, “There is one case of deathbed repentance recorded, that of the penitent thief, that none should despair; and only one, that none should presume.”

Jesus Himself gave this solemn warning:

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe [and therefore is not baptized] will be condemned.”

—Mark 16:16.

By dying in our place at Calvary, Jesus made a public demonstration of His love for us. We need to respond with a public demonstration of our own, an unashamed confession of our commitment to Christ through baptism. Have you begun a new life in Christ? Have you been baptized? If not, why not prepare for baptism in the near future?



Baptism Is Only the Beginning

The rite of baptism, like the wedding ceremony, was meant to be the formal conformation and pledge of a wonderful and growing relationship. But while the ceremony of baptism can have a powerful effect on our Christian experience, we need to be careful not to imagine that it renders us permanently incapable of sinning. Our surrender doesn't automatically last a lifetime.

When a child is born, a celebration is in order. However, after the day of birth is over and the excitement subsides, the baby requires daily feeding, daily bathing, and daily concern for its welfare.

It's much the same with baptism. Paul said of his experience, "I die every day" (1 Corinthians 15:31). By daily turning from selfishness, we become more and more responsive to Christ. In order to grow consistently, we need a daily giving of ourselves to Christ, a daily reception of new life through prayer and Bible study.

What instructions did Jesus give concerning those who are baptized?

"Therefore go and MAKE DISCIPLES of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

—Matthew 28:19-20.

Jesus pointed out the importance of "teaching" those baptized "to obey everything" He commanded. Baptism represents our commitment to a Christian lifestyle. It is to be the beginning of a growing relationship with Christ. Peter admonishes us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). We are able to grow as Christians because "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3). Read the entire first chapter of second Peter for more helpful counsel on how to grow as a Christian.

A Cause for Rejoicing

Philip, a layman in the early Christian church, was once guided by the Holy Spirit to go and talk with a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip discovered the eunuch riding in a chariot and reading a prophecy about Christ, the Messiah, in the book of Isaiah. When the eunuch asked Philip who the prophet was talking about, Philip "told him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:26-35).

"As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing."

—Acts 8:36-39.

What caused the eunuch's rejoicing? It wasn't just the fact that he'd been immersed in water. It was the excitement of making a commitment to Christ. The eunuch had testified to his belief in Jesus' power to come into his heart and save him. Philip took him "down into the water" as an open declaration of the new faith that burned in the man's heart. He buried him in the water as a symbol of the funeral of his old life of sin. Philip

lifted the eunuch “up out of the water” as a sign that the Ethiopian had been born into a new life with Christ. There is great joy in baptism only because we are giving our lives to a great Saviour.

Baptism is cause for great rejoicing because those who place their faith in Christ can have the assurance of eternal life. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). When we are baptized, we’re on an upward path leading us to eternal joy with God.

Baptism also celebrates a present happiness with Christ. Jesus promises the priceless *gift* of the Holy Spirit to those baptized (Acts 2:38), and with the Spirit comes “the *fruit* of the Spirit”—“love,” which fills the life with “patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, italics supplied).

Having Jesus living inside us by His Holy Spirit gives a profound sense of security and certainty:

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry ‘Abba [Father], Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”
—Romans 8:15, 16.

By faith you can hear your heavenly Father addressing you just as He did Jesus: “This is my beloved son or daughter with whom I am well pleased” (compare Matthew 3:17).

This secure relationship with God brings us many benefits, but it doesn’t guarantee a problem-free life. In fact, the enemy often tries to throw the most difficulties at those who’ve just made a commitment to Christ. However, life with Christ does give us a valuable perspective in the rough times. When we’re in God’s hands we can know that He will use everything that happens to us, good and bad, to teach us and help us grow (see Romans 8:28).

A young woman made a decision to commit her life to Christ in baptism—in spite of her husband’s threat of divorce. He wanted no part of her new faith, but she stuck to Jesus and tried to become a more loving wife than ever before. For some time the husband made things difficult at home. But finally he was won over by an argument he couldn’t answer: her transformed life. This man surrendered his life to Christ and he too was baptized.

Sticking close to Christ through “thick and thin” will make us powerful instruments in His hands. Discover the joy of that ultimate commitment. We can commit our lives to Him unconditionally because He has already made the ultimate commitment to us, the ultimate surrender, on the cross. Jesus paid the greatest price to become our Saviour. What a privilege it is to publicly give Him our love and allegiance! If you haven’t yet done so, why not surrender your life to Him right now as you pray:

Dear Father in heaven: I thank You that Jesus died for my sins, was buried, and came out from the grave the eternal Lifegiver. As I surrender my life to You by dying to self, come into my life and fill me with Your presence. Please pour out Your Holy Spirit in my life as You did in the life of Jesus. Fill my life with the peace and joy that comes from following You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Lesson **20** **DISCOVER**
online
The Secret of
Growth Through Fellowship

- Created for Fellowship
- Church Christ Established
- Organized for Strength
- The Joy of Worship
- Finding a Church



The Secret Of Growth Through Fellowship

In the early 60s, Brother Andrew, a man from Holland, smuggled a load of Bibles in his VW across the Romanian border and past communist guards. He checked into a hotel and began praying that God would lead him to the right Christian groups—the ones who could best use his copies of the Scriptures.

That weekend Andrew walked up to the hotel clerk and asked where he might find a church.

The clerk looked at him a little strangely and answered, “We don’t have many of those you know. Besides you couldn’t understand the language.”

“Didn’t you know?” Andrew replied, “Christians speak a kind of universal language.”

“Oh, what’s that?”

“It’s called Agape.”

The clerk had never heard of it, but Andrew assured him, “It’s the most beautiful language in the world.”

Andrew was able to locate several church groups in the area and managed to arrange a meeting with the president and secretary of a certain denomination. Unfortunately, although both Andrew and these men knew several European languages, they found they had none in common. So there they sat staring at each other across the room. Andrew had travelled hundreds of dangerous miles with his precious cargo, but there seemed no way of telling whether these men were genuine Christian brothers or government informants.

Finally he spotted a Romanian Bible on a desk in the office. Andrew reached into his pocket and pulled out a Dutch Bible. He turned to 1 Corinthians 16:20 and held the Bible out, pointing to the name of the book, which they could recognize. Instantly their faces lit up. They quickly found the same chapter and verse in their Romanian Bibles and read:

“All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

The men beamed back at Andrew. Then one of them looked through his Bible and found Proverbs 25:25. Andrew found the verse and read: “Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.”

These men spent half an hour conversing and sharing—just through the words of Scripture. They were so happy in this fellowship that crossed all cultural boundaries that they laughed until tears came to their eyes.

Andrew knew he had found his brothers. When he showed them his load of Bibles, the Romanians were overwhelmed and embraced him again and again.

That evening at the hotel, the clerk approached Andrew and remarked, “Say, I looked up ‘agape’ in the dictionary. There’s no language by that name. That’s just a Greek word for love.”

Andrew replied, “That’s it. I was speaking in it all afternoon.”

Have you discovered that beautiful language? In this guide you’ll learn about how God can bring all of us into His great circle of love.

The Church Created for Fellowship

Jesus established the church in order to meet the basic human requirement of nurture and support. We all have needs. And that's what the church is all about. It's not a place where we come to show off our uprightness like some fancy new hat. It's a place where we come to help each other. The apostolic church became a fellowship of believers committed to each other. The minutes of the early church read:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and TO THE FELLOWSHIP, to the breaking of bread and to prayer....And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

—Acts 2:42, 47.

Scripture reveals a dynamic early church which called men and women into a joyful fellowship that extended all the way up to the Almighty:

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have FELLOWSHIP WITH US. And OUR FELLOWSHIP IS WITH THE FATHER AND WITH HIS SON, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our JOY COMPLETE.”

—1 John 1:3, 4.

A community of hearts, bonded through contact with Jesus and with one another, experience “joy” to the fullest! They’re all speaking the same language, the language of love.

Christians become part of an extended family. They become brothers and sisters in Christ since all have a kindred spirit and a kindred nature. The broader the unity of belief, the stronger the ties among Christians. A Seventh-day Adventist youth serving his country as a soldier discovered the value of such ties. He said, “Wherever I went in a foreign country I had friends, even though I really knew no one. I would look up those at our mission stations and I found that our shared beliefs and hopes tied our hearts together. It wasn’t a casual thing; we trusted each other and found a real warmth of fellowship. I was treated like a member of the family in homes where we could speak only a few words to each other.”

The members of the churches established by Jesus’ apostles were bound together by their similar beliefs, their love of God, and their desire to serve Him and share His grace to the world. This close bond of fellowship was one of the reasons this powerless and persecuted minority turned the world upside down.

The Church Christ Established

Does Christ have a church, or is the whole idea of a religious organization just a human invention? Jesus answers:

“On this ROCK I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.”
—Matthew 16:18, margin.

Jesus is the anchoring Rock, the Cornerstone, of His church. What group formed a part of the foundation?

“Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”
—Ephesians 2:20.

What did the Lord accomplish when the gospel was preached?

“And the Lord added to the CHURCH daily such as should be saved.”
—Acts 2:47, KJV.



When Jesus established the church, He promised that “the gates of hell will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18), and the Christian church still endures. It has had extremely powerful enemies—from Roman emperors to communist dictators—but the blood of martyrs has only caused it to grow stronger. When one Christian was burned at the stake, or tossed to the lions, several others sprang up to take his or her place. The church has often been driven into hiding, but it emerges from the deserts and caves somehow stronger than ever. Skeptics have done their best to reason the Christian Church away and have often predicted it would disappear with other “superstitions.” But Christian truth competes more eloquently than ever in a scientific, secular age.

One of the church’s greatest challenges came soon after its acceptance as the official religion of the Roman Empire. The church grew prosperous—and eventually was corrupted. It seemed spiritually dead in the Dark Ages. But the Lord always preserved a core of courageous and faithful believers who, in the most bleak and difficult times, shined bright as stars on a moonless night. The word church literally means “the called-out ones.” God creates His special people from those He has summoned out of the world.

Paul compares Christ’s relationship to His church to a husband’s tender, protective relationship to His wife:

“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.”
—Ephesians 5:23.

The church is a family with each member establishing relationships to the other members of the family and contributing to their well-being.

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with GOD’S PEOPLE and MEMBERS OF GOD’S HOUSEHOLD.”
—Ephesians 2:19.

Paul also represents the church as a living body, with Christ Himself as its head.

“And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church.”
—Colossians 1:18.

How do we become a member of Christ’s body, the church?

“For we were all BAPTIZED by one Spirit INTO ONE BODY.”
—1 Corinthians 12:13.

When we are baptized, we testify to our faith in Jesus and become members of the “body,” the church.

The book of Revelation pictures churches as golden lampstands (Revelation 1:20). What is Jesus’ relationship to these lampstands?

“I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man.’”
—Revelation 1:12, 13.

John saw the risen Christ walking among His churches, showing His care over them and His presence with them through the years. Christ has never forsaken His people, and He never will.

A Church With a Purpose

A recent Gallup Poll revealed that although 94 per cent of Americans say that religious experience is important to them, only 25 per cent attend church regularly. A lot of people today have bought into the idea that religion is a strictly private matter, nobody else’s business. They excuse their lack of involvement by pointing to hypocrites in the church. But the fact is, Christ brought the church into existence to fulfill our inherent needs. Private commitments tend to wither away when the going gets tough. We need the support of others to keep our faith alive and productive. Individuals need the church because fellowship helps us grow. The church also plays three other important roles:

1. The church guards the truth.

“The church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”
—1 Timothy 3:15.

The church upholds and defends God’s truth before the world. It’s easy for individuals, following their own varied points of view, to go off on all kinds of doctrinal detours. It’s simply not realistic to believe that truth is whatever you find in your heart. Truth is what God says is true. And we need the collective wisdom of other believers to help us focus on the essential truths of Scripture.

Organized for Strength

The church that Christ established had a definite organization. One could be included in, or excluded from its membership (Matthew 18:15-18). God's church appointed leaders and had a world headquarters as well as local meeting places (Acts 8:14; 14:23; 15:2; 1 Timothy 3:1-10). When they were baptized, believers joined a definite, organized group. (Acts 2:41 and 47).

The church exists for mutual encouragement.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but LET US ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER — and all the more as you see the Day [of Christ's coming] approaching.”

—Hebrews 10:24, 25.

This, in a nutshell, is what a healthy church group does. Its members build each other up in the faith, they encourage one other.

God organized His church to strengthen God's people—and also to serve the world. The plain fact is, we can do far more together than we can as isolated individuals. Take just one example: the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We carry on an extensive medical work around the world—from inner-city health vans to clinics in remote islands of the South Pacific. Our educational institutions have brought tens of thousands of youth to a knowledge of a better life in Christ—from Loma Linda University, pioneering in heart transplants, to tiny mission schools scattered through the African interior. We carry on famine and disaster relief. Local churches in the U.S. and Canada help clothe and feed the poor and homeless at over 2000 Community Service Centers. And even more important, groups of Seventh-day Adventist believers are sharing the message of salvation through a soon-coming Saviour in more than 200 countries.

Could private religion have accomplished all this? Of course not. Only an organized group of dedicated Christians could have this worldwide impact.

Christ and the apostles emphasized the need for individual believers to work together.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable . . . its parts should have equal concern for each other Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

—1 Corinthians 12:21-27.

All parts of the body are not exactly alike, yet every segment is important and all must work together in harmony. An eye separated from the body can't see. A hand cut off has no value. Whether we are an eye, a hand, or even only a finger, we can't be truly effective for Christ totally on our own. Belonging to a church, being united to the other members of the body, strengthens us as Christians.

The Joy of Worship

Deep in our hearts lies a longing to worship God. But that need can wither away unless given expression. So we are urged to give voice to our deepest admiration:

“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.”

—Psalm 29:2.

“My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”

—Psalm 84:2.

How did the psalmist feel when he thought about going to the place of worship?

“I REJOICED with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’”

—Psalm 122:1.

What part does music have in public worship?

“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.”

—Psalm 100:2.

“Praise God in his sanctuary; . . . praise him with the strings and flute, . . . praise him with resounding of cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.”

—Psalm 150:1, 4-6.

The Bible tells us that offerings are an appropriate part of divine worship.

“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.”

—Psalm 96:8-9.

Prayer is also a vital aspect of public worship.

“Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.”

—Psalm 95:6.

Bible study and preaching are central to New Testament worship. Beginning with Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, found in Acts 2, the book of Acts reveals the fundamental role the Word of God played in the services and faith sharing activities of the early church. From the time of the Protestant reformers to our day, every great religious revival has been based on biblical preaching. Why?

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

—Hebrews 4:12.

What's Right With the Church?

Some object that the church is full of imperfect people. That certainly is true. What Henry Ward Beecher said is also true: “The church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones.”

Since none of us is perfect, the church will never be perfect either. In one of His parables Jesus reminded us that weeds grow among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30). Someone has suggested that the church should be called the Society of the Forgiven and the Forgiving.



When we read the New Testament letters of Paul, we discover that the apostolic church had critical problems. And the church today often has serious defects. At some time or another most of us have gone to church expecting to be fed with the Word of God, but have come away hungry. We've known ministers who didn't take their responsibilities to their congregation seriously enough, and church members who didn't live what they preached. Some churches have grown unfriendly, and as one person said, “so cold, you could skate down the center aisle.”

Sometimes it's very hard to look past these failures and see Christ's original intent for His church. Sometimes it's easy to walk away from the problems. But please remember that no faulty congregation can ever destroy or disturb the Great Cornerstone of the church—Jesus Christ Himself. So, in the long run, our only hope of receiving nurture in imperfect churches is to keep our primary gaze on the Saviour who ministers to us.

The church will never cease to be a place of worship where sinners meet God. Jacob said of the place where he found God:

“Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it. . . . How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”
—Genesis 28:16, 17.

Christ is both the foundation and head of the church, and its Saviour and Lord. Despite its faults, the church belongs to Him. Those who come inside and focus on Christ will see His glory and the power of salvation. They will have the joy of the Lord and the joy of shared fellowship with believers.

“CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”
—Ephesians 5:25-27.

The church is so important to Jesus that He “gave himself up for her” when He died for each of us individually and for the church collectively. So church membership should be important to you. What about your relationship to the church? Are you a member of Christ's body?

Finding a Church

How many true faiths, does Jesus have in the world?

“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, ONE FAITH, one baptism.”

—Ephesians 4:4, 5.

Since Christ has only “one faith,” how can we know which one it is? Jesus gives us the key:

“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

—John 7:17.



When we make a commitment to do God’s will, He will help us see whether the teaching of a church is from God or is only human tradition. The key ingredient when finding a church is examining its respect for and allegiance to the Word of God. Genuine fellowship is built around Scripture, not just around a charismatic leader or a great institution. Before choosing a church to join, it is important to understand several subjects not yet discussed in the DISCOVER guides. The guides that follow will give some guiding principles for making a right choice when selecting a church. Guide 26 will deal specifically with this subject.

Continue making discoveries in these guides, walk in the light as God reveals it to you from the Scriptures, and He will make plain His will for you. A growing Christian is a person who opens heart and mind to accept the truth as God reveals it from His Word.

God and Father of us all: I will always be grateful that I received the Good News about Jesus. I am thankful for those who were concerned enough to sacrifice to spread the gospel. This moment I want to become a part of the great movement of believers who are proclaiming Your love. Make me an effective witness in and through Your church. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson **21**
**Can the Majority
Be Wrong?**

DISCOVER
online

- **A Puzzling Question**
- **Did God Change the Day?**
- **Where Did Sunday Come From?**
- **Who Made the Change?**
- **What Is the Real Issue?**



Can the Majority Be Wrong?

In guide 16 we discovered that experiencing Sabbath rest is an important antidote to today's stressful living. Since God understands our every need, He established each seventh day for our physical rest and our spiritual refreshment. After creating our world in six days, He "rested" on the seventh day, "blessed it," and "made it holy" (**Genesis 2:1-3**). *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

When God gave the Ten Commandments to His people, Israel, He placed the commandment to observe the seventh day Sabbath at the heart of His law (Exodus 20:8-11). According to this commandment, the Sabbath is a memorial of God's creative power, a day to pause and think about the beauties and wonders of His created works, a day to relax and come close to our Creator, a day to explore in greater depth our relationship with Him.

During Jesus' human life on earth, He too kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and endorsed it as a day that benefits Christians (Mark 2:27, 28). Several texts in the book of Acts make it clear that Christ's disciples worshiped on the Sabbath after His resurrection (Acts 13:14; 16:13; 17:2; 18:1-4, 11).

A Puzzling Question

This brings us to a subject that many find perplexing. The Christian world has for some time observed two different days. On one hand, most Christians sincerely observe Sunday, the first day of the week, which they believe to be a memorial of Christ's resurrection. On the other hand, a large group of Christians, equally sincere, believe that the Bible honors only the seventh-day as the Sabbath and nowhere affirms the sanctity of Sunday.

Does it really make any difference which day we observe as the Sabbath? As sincere and earnest people who want to know the truth, we must always ask ourselves: "What matters to Jesus? What does Jesus desire me to do?" After all, we want the assurance of following Bible truth and obeying God's instruction, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

In coming to a decision about this, several important facts need to be made clear: Who changed the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week? Does the Bible authorize such a shift? If so, did God, Christ, or perhaps the apostles make the change? We'll proceed by looking at all the possibilities.

Did God Change the Day?

Is there any pronouncement from God that changes the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week? Most Christians accept the Ten Commandments as a valid guide to live by. God gave them to Moses and His people, Israel, at Sinai. Moses reminded Israel:



“These are THE COMMANDMENTS THE LORD PROCLAIMED IN A LOUD VOICE to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. THEN HE WROTE THEM ON TWO STONE TABLETS AND GAVE THEM TO ME.”

—Deuteronomy 5:22.

The Ten Commandments are the only message God has ever personally written out for the human race. They are so important, He wrote them on stone with His own finger (Exodus 31:18). In the fourth commandment God instructs us:

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but THE SEVENTH DAY IS A SABBATH TO THE LORD YOUR GOD. On it you shall not do any work. . . . For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he RESTED on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD BLESSED the Sabbath day and MADE IT HOLY.”

—Exodus 20:8-11.

When God created our world, He set apart “the seventh day” as “the Sabbath to the Lord” by three divine acts: (1) “On the seventh day he rested from all his work,” (2) He “blessed the Sabbath day,” and (3) He “made it holy” (Genesis 2:1-3). Again at Sinai when He gave the Ten Commandments, God reiterated these same truths.

When God gave the Ten Commandments to His people, He also made it clear that no human being should revise or edit the instruction from His holy lips.

“DO NOT ADD to what I command you and DO NOT SUBTRACT from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.”

—Deuteronomy 4:2.

God Himself pledges not to alter His commands:

“I WILL NOT violate my covenant or ALTER WHAT MY LIPS HAVE UTTERED.”

—Psalm 89:34.

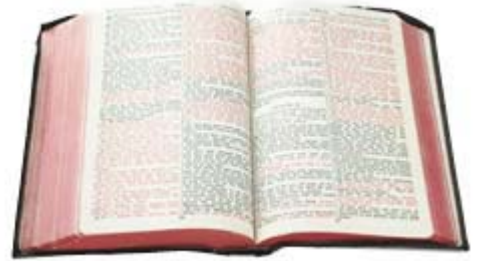
The Bible is clear that God did not change the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week.

Did Jesus Change the Sabbath?

According to Jesus, the Ten Commandments and all the moral principles in the Old Testament Scriptures are not subject to change, and they are to guide His followers:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

—Matthew 5:17-19.



Jesus faithfully honored and observed the Sabbath. He is our example in Sabbath-keeping.

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.”

—Luke 4:16.

Looking to the future, Jesus wanted His disciples to continue experiencing the joys of true Sabbath-keeping. He instructed them to pray that they would not have to flee from Jerusalem during its siege on the Sabbath.

“Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.”

—Matthew 24:20.

Jesus was here speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem—an event that took place in A.D. 70, nearly forty years after His resurrection. Jesus did not change the Sabbath commandment, or any other of the commandments. In fact, He instructed the rich young ruler to obey the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19:16-22). It is clear from Jesus’ teaching and example that we still need the Sabbath for rest, relaxation, and spending time with God.

Did The Apostles Change the Sabbath?

James, the first leader of the early Christian church, wrote concerning the Ten Commandments:

“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.”

—James 2:10, 11.

Luke, a physician and evangelist in the early church, reports:

“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.”

—Acts 16:13.

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, who wrote much of the New Testament, affirms:

“For somewhere he [God] has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work’ [see Genesis 2:2]. . . . There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.”

—Hebrews 4:4, 9.

The New Testament book of Acts mentions 84 different Sabbaths observed by the apostles, all of them more than 14 years after the resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 13:14, 42, 44:	2 Sabbaths at Antioch
Acts 16:13:	1 Sabbath at Philippi
Acts 17:2:	3 Sabbaths at Thessalonica
Acts 18:4, 11	78 Sabbaths at Corinth
Total 84 Sabbaths celebrated by Christ’s followers	

John, the last of the twelve apostles to die, wrote five books of the Bible—one gospel, three epistles, and the prophetic book of Revelation. He died about A.D. 100, some 70 years after the resurrection of Jesus. Interestingly enough, nowhere in all of his writings does he speak of a change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. In fact, John himself kept the Sabbath. He wrote:

“On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit.” —Revelation 1:10.

According to Jesus, the Lord’s Day is the Sabbath:

“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” —Matthew 12:8.

A search of the Scriptural evidence reveals that the apostles made no attempt to change God’s day of rest from the seventh to the first day of the week. The New Testament mentions the first day of the week only eight times. In none of these instances is the first day of the week spoken of as a holy day, nor is it even hinted that we should set it aside as a day of worship.

A critical examination of the eight texts referring to the first day of the week points out these Sunday events:

- 1. The women came to the tomb on the first day of the week** (Matthew 28:1).
- 2. “When the Sabbath was over” the women resumed their work or secular tasks on the first day of the week** (Mark 16:1, 2).
- 3. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene early the first day of the week** (Mark 16:9).
- 4. Jesus’ followers resumed their secular activities** (Luke 24:1).
- 5. Mary went to the grave of Jesus and found the tomb empty on the first day of the week** (John 20:1).
- 6. The disciples gathered together “for fear of the Jews” (not for worship) on the first day of the week** (John 20:19).
- 7. Paul asked church members to take account of their funds on the first day of the week, and “set aside a sum of money” for the poor at Jerusalem** (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). The passage does not mention any religious meeting.
- 8. In Acts 20:7 Luke speaks of Paul’s preaching on the first day of the week at an incidental farewell meeting.** Of course Paul preached every day, and the apostles broke bread daily (Acts 2:46).

None of these scriptures suggest that the apostles intended to stop observing the seventh-day Sabbath. These men mentioned no change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. There is clearly no New Testament evidence for a change of the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week. The change came after the days of Jesus and the Apostles, so we must turn to history to see when and how the change came about.

Where Did Sunday Come From?

The apostles clearly warn us that some Christians would drift away from the doctrines of New Testament Christianity. Paul said:

“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!”

—Acts 20:29-31.

And that is exactly what happened. Credible historians clearly record how Christians began to stray from apostolic purity. Traditions and doctrines which Paul, Peter, and the other founders of the Christian church had never endorsed gradually crept into the church.

“From simple beginnings the Church developed a distinct priesthood and an elaborate service. In this way, Christianity and the higher forms of paganism tended to come nearer and nearer to each other as time went on, . . . they tended to merge into one another like streams which had been following converging courses.”—J. H. Robinson, *An Introduction to the History of Western Europe*, page 31 (italics supplied).

The change from Sabbath observance to Sunday observance took place after the New Testament was completed and the apostles had all died. History records that Christians eventually shifted from worshiping and resting on the seventh day to the first day of the week.

“A history of the problem shows that in some places, it was really only after some centuries that the Sabbath rest really was entirely abolished, and by that time the practice of observing a bodily rest on Sunday had taken place.”—Vincent J. Kelly, *Forbidden Sunday and Feast-Day Occupations* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1943), p. 15.

But of course believers didn’t stop observing the seventh-day Sabbath on a given weekend and then suddenly begin keeping Sunday as the Lord’s day. The earliest authentic instance of Sunday observance by Christians occurred in Italy, in the middle of the second century after Christ. For a long time after that many Christians observed both days, while still others kept the Sabbath only.

On March 7, A.D. 321, Constantine the Great issued the first civil Sunday law, compelling all the people, except farmers, in the Roman Empire to rest on Sunday. This, with five other civil laws decreed by Constantine concerning Sunday, set the legal precedent for all civil Sunday legislation from that time to the present. In the fourth century the Council of Laodicea prohibited Christians from abstaining from work on the Sabbath. It urged them if at all possible to honor Sunday by abstaining from work.

History shows that Sunday worship and observance is a man-made convention. The Bible gives no authority for doing away with the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment. In the Old Testament, the prophet Daniel predicted that during the Christian era a deceptive power would attempt to change God’s law. The *God Cares Daniel* course, which you can request from us and study after you finish the Discover course, presents a detailed explanation of that prophecy.

Who Made the Change?

Who officially moved the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week? The Catholic Church claims to have done so. In an attempt to save the crumbling Roman Empire, well-meaning church leaders compromised and attempted to change the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday . A representative catechism of the Roman Catholic Church reads:

“Q. Which is the Sabbath day?

“A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

“Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

“A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church . . . transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.”—Peter Geiermann, *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* (1957 edition), page 50.

The Catholic *Mirror* of September 23, 1893, reported:

“The Catholic Church for over 1,000 years before the existence of a Protestant, by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.”

Here are two additional statements by Roman Catholic leaders:

“You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify.”—James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 89.

“The holy day, the Sabbath, was changed from Saturday to Sunday . . . not from any directions noted in the Scriptures, but from the Church's sense of its own power. . . . People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority, should logically become 7th Day Adventists, and keep Saturday holy.”—Cardinal Maida, Archbishop of Detroit, Saint Cathrine Catholic Church Sentinel, Algonac, Michigan, May 21, 1995.

Nothing could be plainer. The Catholic Church proudly announces that human church leaders made the change.

What Do Some Protestants Say?

Official documents outlining the beliefs of several Protestant denominations agree that the Bible provides no authority for Sunday observance.

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church, wrote in the *Augsburg Confession*, Article 28, paragraph 9:

“They [the Roman Catholics] allege the Sabbath changed into Sunday, the Lord’s Day, contrary to the decalogue [the Ten Commandments], . . . neither is there any example more boasted of than the changing of the Sabbath day. Great, say they, is the power and authority of the church, since it dispensed with one of the ten commandments.”

Methodist theologians Amos Binney and Daniel Steele observed:

“It is true, there is no positive command for infant baptism . . . nor is there any for keeping holy the first day of the week.”—*Theological Compend* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1902), pp. 180, 181.

Dr. N. Summerbell, historian of the Disciples of Christ or Christian Church, wrote:

“The Roman Church had totally apostatized . . . It reversed the Fourth Commandment by doing away with the Sabbath of God’s word, and instituting Sunday as a holy day.”—*A True History of the Christian and the Christian Church*, pages 417, 418.

A leading Protestant church historian wrote:

“The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a divine command in this respect, far from them, and from the early apostolic church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday. Perhaps at the end of the second century a false application of this kind had begun to take place; for men appear by that time to have considered laboring on Sunday as a sin.”— Dr. Augustus Neander, *The History of the Christian Religion and Church During the Three First Centuries* (Rose translation), p. 186.

What Is The Real Issue?

This brings us face to face with the questions: Why do so many Christians observe Sunday without Bible authority? Even more important, Which day shall I keep? Shall I follow those who say, “I don’t think it makes any difference which day I observe as long as I keep one day in seven”? Or, shall I count as important the day Jesus, our Creator (Colossians 1:15-17), established when He created our world (Genesis 2:1-3), and the day God pointed out in the Ten Commandments: “the seventh day is the Sabbath”?

Here we are dealing with more than just an outward observance—which day happens to be biblically correct. The essential issue is that of obedience to Jesus. It involves our fundamental allegiance: Whom shall I obey? Shall I obey Christ, the Son of God, or human tradition in the matter of the day I keep holy?

God is not arbitrary. At creation and in His Ten Commandments, He had a reason for asking us to observe the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus “rested” on the Sabbath and established it as a memorial to His creative power. Our Creator set aside the Sabbath as a “holy” day, as a time for us and our families to come closer to Him for strength and refreshment.

Some believers respond to this information by saying, “I keep every day holy.” It’s certainly true that we can and should worship God in our hearts on every day of the week. But the fact is, God has still made one day for a special purpose; He made the seventh day of the week “holy.” On the Sabbath He comes near to us in a unique way; He “blessed” the day with His special presence and asks us to devote the whole day to Him.



Let us be completely open with you. There is no support for Sunday observance in the Bible. The issues are plain. Which day we worship on does make a difference. The choice is clear: the teachings of men or the commands of God. The word of men or the Word of God. A human substitute or a divine command.

The prophet Daniel sounds an urgent warning to those who would “try to change the set times and the laws” (Daniel 7:25). God is calling His people back to obedience. He invites them to keep the Sabbath as a symbol of loyalty and love to Him.

Jesus promises fullness of joy to those who love Him enough to obey His commands.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

—John 15:9-11.

We have a wonderful Saviour. He is eager for us to experience His love in all its fullness. A heart of willing obedience opens the door wide to that love. In the Garden of Gethsemane Christ submitted completely to the Father’s will—even though He faced the cross and the sins of the world were crushing out His life. As He cried out to God, “Take this cup from me,” He remained surrendered in His pleading, and added, “Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

Christ longs for us to experience the fulfillment that a truly surrendered life brings. And He also wants us to experience the joy of Sabbath rest. He wants us to trust Him enough to obey Him in all the details of life. If you answer God's call and obey all of His commandments, you will experience the promise of Jesus that His joy will be "in you" and "your joy" will "be complete" (John 15:11).

Many Sabbath-keepers agree with the person who said: "Since keeping the Sabbath, such a joy has taken possession of my life, such peace has flooded my inner self, such a satisfying presence has filled my heart; that the joy of surrendering everything to Jesus has transformed my life." Have you discovered the beauty of Sabbath rest?

When people obey God and begin to keep the Sabbath, some face work or family difficulties. Remember that Jesus can and will give you grace and power to solve these problems. The way may not be easy, but Jesus will give you sustaining power, and a richer Christian life. He will fulfill His promises. His unseen presence will be with you, and your joy will be complete.

Dear Father in heaven: Thank You for dying to give me eternal life. Thank You for Your Word which guides my life as a Christian. Thank You for revealing to me the truth about the Sabbath. Help me always to be honest with You and with my own heart. Help me to stand on Your side always. In all the problems that I may face, please send Jesus to be by my side and help me live always for Him. In His wonderful name. Amen.

Lesson **22**
Is God Fair?

DISCOVER
online

- **One Thousand Years Unveiled**
- **Resurrected at Christ's Coming**
- **The Righteous Judge the Wicked**
- **The Final Judgement Scene**
- **Earth Cleansed and Made New**



Is God Fair?

A boy in the inner city is killed by stray gang bullets as he does homework at the kitchen table.

A young mother in the suburbs finds that her child has contracted AIDS from a contaminated blood transfusion.

The tragedies go on and on in our world. Inexplicable and heartrending. And we long so much for an answer to it all. A PERMANENT answer.

As author Alister McGrath asked, “Where is God in a world of meaningless suffering and death? God may be in heaven—but is He here?”—*The Mystery of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 107.)

We’ve heard assurances that God is fair and just. The Psalmist tells us:

“The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of His unfailing love.”
—**Psalm 33:5.** *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

But if that is true, how is He going to make the world come out right? How is He going to bring an end to suffering and tragedy? We know He can give us strength and courage to make it through the tough times, but we don’t want the tough times to last forever. We want an ultimate solution. We want to see the bright light at the end of the tunnel.

In this guide you’ll discover how God will bring sin and suffering to an end. And when He does, every being in the universe will testify that God is just. The 20th chapter of Revelation shows us how and when all this takes place.

The One Thousand Years Unveiled

Revelation 20 zeros in on a 1,000-year period that follows the Second Coming of Christ. The events surrounding this “millennium” mark the final act in the conflict between Christ and Satan that has been going on since sin entered the universe.

This cosmic drama began in heaven when Lucifer became jealous of Christ, started a war with the unfallen angels, was expelled, and fled to our world. The drama continued on earth in the Garden of Eden, then down through the centuries until it reached its first climax when the devil impelled human beings to crucify Christ. (You may wish to review this sad story in guide 3.) The drama will reach its final climax at the close of the 1,000-year period when our sinful world is cleansed and placed under Christ’s control.



Revelation 20 shows us that two resurrections serve as boundaries for the 1,000-year period. Who does God raise from the dead in the first resurrection that takes place at the beginning of the 1,000 years?

“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

—Revelation 20:6.

The “blessed and holy,” those who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour, come up in the “first resurrection.” If they are to “reign with” Christ during the 1,000 years, obviously they must return to life at the beginning of the 1,000 years.

Who are raised in the second resurrection at the close of the thousand-year period?

“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.”

—Revelation 20:5.

The “rest of the dead” can refer only to the wicked dead, for the righteous, those saved through their faith in Christ, are brought back to life at the beginning of the 1,000 years.

So the 1,000-year period is marked off by two resurrections: the resurrection of the righteous at its beginning, and the resurrection of the wicked at its close.

Resurrected at Christ's Coming

The first resurrection, that of the righteous, takes place at the second coming of Christ.

“For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE first. After that, WE WHO ARE STILL ALIVE and are left WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM in the clouds TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

—1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

When Jesus comes to this earth again, He raises “the dead in Christ” and takes them, along with the righteous who are alive, to heaven (John 14:1-3). At that time He transforms all the righteous and they become immortal—no longer subject to disease, old age, or death (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

What happens to the wicked people still alive when Jesus comes? Because they still cling to sin and haven't accepted Christ, they can't exist in God's presence; they are destroyed “by the brightness” at the return of Christ (Luke 17:29, 30; 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 8). (You may wish to review in guide 8 the events surrounding Jesus' return.)

Satan Chained to Earth for One Thousand Years

When the 1,000 years begin, the righteous have all gone to heaven and the wicked are all dead. What will happen on this world during the 1,000 years?

“And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.”

—Revelation 20:1-3.

At Jesus' coming Satan is bound and will remain in chains during the 1,000 years. Where is Satan imprisoned? In the “Abyss,” the English equivalent of a Greek word that is translated from a Hebrew word which means “very deep” or “bottomless.” The word used for “Abys” appears in the Septuagint (the Greek Version of the Old Testament which was translated from Hebrew in pre-Christian times). In Genesis 1:2 the Septuagint uses the word “Abyss” to describe the earth in its undeveloped state before the days of creation began. It seems clear then that our earth is the Abyss where God imprisons Satan.

Scripture describes Satan as bound by “a great chain.” Is this a literal chain? No, the context makes clear that it is symbolic—sort of a chain of circumstances. The phrase brings to mind an expression we use when we can't do someone a favor: “I'd like to help you, *but my hands are tied*.”

Satan would like very much to continue deceiving and oppressing individuals during the 1,000 years, but his hands are bound by a chain of circumstances. He can find no righteous people to tempt during this period, because they are all in heaven. And he can't find any wicked to lead, because they are all dead, asleep in the dust of the earth. Satan simply wanders about the desolate, ruined earth without any people under his control. Circumstances “keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended” (Revelation 20:3).

Here we find Satan in the last act of his age-long struggle against God. His evil character remains unchanged. He and his angels are confined to our empty world. Unable to deceive or tempt anyone, he roams an empty world, forced to ponder all the heartaches and tragedy he has caused through the centuries.

The Righteous Judge the Wicked

The thousand year period is also a time of judgment. But remember that the judgment consists of four main stages:

1. The pre-advent judgment of the righteous before Christ's second coming.
2. The reward of the righteous at the second coming.
3. The judging of the wicked during the 1,000 years.
4. The reward of Satan and the wicked at the end of that period. (You may wish to review guide 13 that deals with stages 1 and 2 of the judgment, the investigation and reward of the righteous.) We will now look at stages 3 and 4, the investigation and reward of the wicked.

We've already seen that the righteous dead come from their graves at the second coming of Christ and, with the righteous who have never died, leave this earth and are taken to God's heavenly paradise with Jesus and the holy angels. Those redeemed by Christ find their home in heaven during the 1,000 years. What will the righteous be doing in heaven during this 1,000-year period?

"Do you not know that THE SAINTS [the saved] WILL JUDGE THE WORLD? . . . Do you not know that we will JUDGE ANGELS?."

—1 Corinthians 6:2-3.

"I SAW THRONES ON WHICH WERE SEATED THOSE WHO HAD BEEN GIVEN AUTHORITY TO JUDGE. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God....THEY CAME TO LIFE AND REIGNED WITH CHRIST A THOUSAND YEARS."

—Revelation 20:4.

During the 1,000 years, the righteous will review the cases of wicked human beings and fallen angels, including their leader, Satan. How fitting for the martyrs, the overcomers, and the battle-scarred adherents of the gospel to examine and understand God's judgment of the wicked.

God has graciously given redeemed human beings the chance to evaluate His dealings with the wicked. We know what it's like to struggle in a sinful world; we've rubbed shoulders with these people day after day. We may have a lot of questions, like: "Why isn't my neighbor here? He seemed like such a good person." Or, "Why didn't my aunt make it?" All our questions will be answered in this phase of the judgment. When we go over the records and judge the dead "according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (Revelation 20:12), we will see for ourselves that in all His dealings with human beings, God has been just and fair with everyone.

A seminary professor once surprised his students with the question, "Did you know that there will be tears shed in heaven?" The students weren't so sure about that. But the professor explained that the righteous will judge their lost friends and loved ones during the 1,000 years in heaven. It will be a sad experience; we'll understand just how individuals turned away from God's heroic attempts to save them. We'll see how the Holy Spirit offered people chance after chance to yield to God. The fairness of each sentence will become plain. There will be a time of grieving. But we can have the assurance that, after coming to terms with these tragedies, God "will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4).

Satan Unchained When the One Thousand Years End

At the close of the 1,000 years the curtain lifts on the final act in the judgment drama.

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

—Revelation 21:2.

This wonderful city, whose streets of gold and pearly gates have echoed with our exultant shouts of praise, has been our home for a thousand years. Now the Holy City—with Christ and all the people He’s redeemed inside—descends from heaven to our world.

What happens to the wicked at that time?

“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.”

—Revelation 20:5.

The “rest of the dead” must refer to the wicked dead, because the righteous dead came to life in the first resurrection at the beginning of the 1,000 years. So it is the wicked who are resurrected in the second resurrection at the close of the 1,000 years.

What does Satan do at the close of the 1,000 years?

“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth . . . to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city He loves.”

—Revelation 20:7-9.

When the righteous descend to earth in the Holy City and the wicked are resurrected, “Satan will be released.” He again has the wicked to lead and the righteous as his target. Not wasting a moment, He immediately begins to organize the wicked into a vast army.

This seems a perfect opportunity to Satan. The Holy City is not fortified, its inhabitants are not armed. Deciding to take it by force and plunder its riches, he convinces his followers that, because they outnumber the righteous, victory is certain.

Satan can plot strategy with military geniuses from all periods of earth’s history. Generals who’ve conquered empires can organize his armies. Scientists can try to create new weapons of mass destruction. This second resurrection reveals a sad reality: in death the characters of the wicked have experienced no change. They come from the grave with the same ambitions, the same selfish desires.

Finally, Satan gives the command to march against the city. The vast multitude moves with military precision to claim this glittering metropolis from outer space as their capital. Satan and the wicked lay siege to the New Jerusalem; this is their last chance to sabotage Jesus’ plan to rescue humanity forever from the curse of sin. But as they take up positions around the New Jerusalem, a horrible truth begins to sink into their hearts: “We’re on the outside! We’re outside in the dark!” The wicked catch a glimpse of the real horror of being lost—lost forever.

The Final Judgment Scene

Here, for the first and last time, all the human race meets together face-to-face. Jesus leads the redeemed children of God who are inside the city, and Satan heads the throngs of the wicked who are just outside the walls. At this critical moment, God carries out the final stage of judgment and the wicked receive their day in court.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. . . . And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.”

—Revelation 20:11-13.

As the wicked stand before the throne of justice, their whole life opens before them. From the records contained in heaven, Jesus, the righteous Judge, formally unfolds the full story of His dealings with fallen men and women, and fallen angels.

The entire universe looks on with intense interest. Standing before the throne of God, Jesus gives everyone a comprehensive view of His redemptive work. He reveals that He has indeed come to seek and save the lost. He entered our world in human flesh, lived a sinless life amid our struggles and temptations, made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross, and served as our Priest in heaven. Finally, when Christ sorrowfully steps forward and passes sentence on those who’ve persisted to the end in rejecting His grace, every being in the universe will acknowledge the justice and necessity of this final act of divine judgment.

“We will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’”

—Romans 14:10-11.

“He [Christ Jesus] humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

—Philippians 2:8-11.

Ever since sin began, the devil has been slandering God’s character, accusing Him of being unfair. But now all the questions are answered, all the perplexities resolved. At the end, not even Satan himself, the great accuser, will have a word to say in his own defense. Now every being in the universe acknowledges that, even in judgment, especially in judgment, Jesus, the Lamb of God, is worthy of our love and worship. A great chorus declares: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain” (Revelation 5:12).

The whole plan and purpose of God is now fully revealed, and God’s character stands vindicated.

“All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

—Revelation 15:4.

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!’”

—Revelation 5:13.

Not only the saved, but also evil angels and Satan himself will confess that Satan’s way has been wrong and that God’s ways are just and true. All see that evil and selfishness has led only to unhappiness and discontent—that such a life is not worth continuing.

Sin Meets Its Final End

Even though Satan and the vast throng of wicked people admit that God’s way is right, their hearts are not changed, their characters remain evil. And after judgment is pronounced, the wicked themselves move to meet their tragic fate:

“They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city He loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur. . . . Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

—Revelation 20:9, 10, 14, 15.

In the final judgment the fires of the eternal God will destroy sin and those who stubbornly cling to it. Satan and all the lost perish in this “second death,” an eternal death from which there is no awakening. Their course of rebellion has left the wicked unfit for real happiness, and they are destroyed with the devil and his angels. The heavenly fire completely cleanses the earth of the ravages of sin; God has a clean universe at last, never again to be scarred by evil. The epic struggle between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, is finally over, and Christ reigns.

Where do you plan to be in that day? Have you decided to be with Christ inside the city and saved forever? Or will you be outside the city without Christ and lost forever? No matter what life has brought to you, if you place your life in the hands of Jesus now, you can be inside the city with Christ and the redeemed. If you have not done so, give your heart to Jesus now, and He will surround you with His love and forgiveness. This is your opportunity. This is your day of salvation.

The Earth Cleansed and Made New

From the ashes of this final, cleansing holocaust, God will create a new world:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. . . . And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. . . . I am making everything new!’”

—Revelation 21:1-5.

Restored to its original beauty, the earth becomes the home of redeemed humanity through endless ages. Freed from selfishness, sickness, and suffering, we have a whole universe to explore, wonderful relationships to develop, and an eternity in which to sit at Jesus’ feet to listen, learn and love. (For a full description of that new world, you may wish to again read guide 9.)

The curtain falls on the ancient drama of sin, and rises on the glory of a new world of limitless possibilities. Of Jesus, the Ruler of that coming world, we read:

“And the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.”

—Isaiah 9:6, 7.

You can live forever with that Wonderful Counselor and Everlasting Father. You can stand inside the New Jerusalem on that day when all of humanity confronts each other face-to-face. If you have placed your life in the hands of Jesus, you need never experience the unspeakable horror of those on the outside of the city who realize they are lost forever. By giving your trust to Christ as Saviour, you can be assured that, when the record of your life appears in the judgment, Jesus will say, “I died for that person, the record of my perfect life belongs to My beloved one!”



Dear Father: How thankful I am that You are not only fair, but loving and merciful! How thankful I am for Jesus and all that He has done and is doing for me every day! How thankful I am that He died to save me so that I can be inside the Holy City and be saved forever! Yes, Father, I plan to be there inside that city. Keep me faithful, I pray. In Jesus name, Amen.

Lesson **23**
**What and
Where Is Hell**

DISCOVER
online

- **Jesus' Final Heartbreak**
- **Where and When Will Hell Burn?**
- **How Long Will Hell Burn?**
- **Why Must There Be a Hell at All?**
- **What Will It Cost to Be Lost?**



What and Where Is Hell?

In July of 1976 Gary Gilmore walked into a gas-station and shot the attendant, a student at Brigham Young University. The next evening he forced a young motel clerk at gun-point to hand over some cash. Then Gilmore asked his victim to kneel and shot him in the back of the head.

Most Americans thought this was one man who deserved to die for his cold-blooded murders. But when a Utah judge sentenced him to death by firing squad, the whole nation plunged into controversy. Because of a Supreme Court ruling, no one had been executed in the U.S. for almost a decade. The gas chambers and electric chairs had been idle and the prospect of reactivating them bothered a lot of people.

Right-to-life lawyers tried desperately to find grounds for a stay of Gilmore's execution, even though Gilmore said he wanted to die. Groups against the death penalty protested loudly, calling it an inhumane "paganistic ritual." Others affirmed the value of the death penalty as a deterrent to individuals who might kill in cold blood. A few men actually phoned the Utah state prison warden, asking to join the firing squad.

And so the debate raged on. Was it right for the state to kill Gary Gilmore? Was he beyond redemption? What was the most humane way of executing condemned criminals? Some thought an injection with a lethal drug would be the most painless. Others maintained that life would end more quickly by hanging.

But in all this discussion, in all this passionate debate over the death penalty, there was one option no one considered. No one suggested that Gilmore be tortured to death. The man had a long criminal record. He had cruelly ended two lives. He seemed hopelessly pathological. But still, no one even among the most vocal supporters of the death penalty proposed that Gilmore pay for his crimes with physical agony. No one, for example, insisted he slowly burn to death.

But many sincere Christians assume that our Heavenly Father will do worse than that. The wicked, they say, must be tortured in order to pay for their sins. And what's more, they picture God's execution grounds as a place of endless torment, a place where the agonies of the damned continue forever.

Just what does happen to the wicked in hell? And how does their final fate fit in with God's love and justice? Let's look for biblical answers in this Discover guide.

Jesus' Final Heartbreak

For 6,000 years God has been pleading with men and women to turn toward him and be rescued from sin. The prophet Ezekiel conveys a typical appeal:

“As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”

—**Ezekiel 33:11.** (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

Jesus continued the same appeal during His ministry on earth:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened [by sin], and I will give you rest.”

—**Matthew 11:28.**

When Jesus cried out on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” He laid bare His aching heart (Luke 23:34). Then He added, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Soon afterward Jesus yielded up His life. Some physicians believe He died of a broken heart (John 19:30 and 34). The cross revealed how much God wants to rescue fallen humanity.

But even with this powerful demonstration of divine love, many individuals will still not turn to Jesus. And those who persist in holding on to sin will eventually be destroyed by fire. That will be a heartbreaking time for Jesus as He sees the fire consuming the ones He died to save.

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, NOT WANTING ANYONE TO PERISH, but everyone to come to repentance.”

—**2 Peter 3:9.**

Jesus wants all to be saved and escape the destruction awaiting the sin-polluted earth.

“The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and THE EARTH AND EVERYTHING IN IT WILL BE BURNED UP [margin]. . . . But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

—**2 Peter 3:10, 13.**

As long as sin rules in this world, it will continue to multiply human misery. So sin has to be completely destroyed. If people refuse to let go of their sins, they will be consumed with them in “the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14-15). Christ’s final heartbreak comes when He must finally cleanse the universe of evil, put an end to sin, and destroy those who hold on to their sin, those for whom He died and longed to save.

Where and When Will Hell Burn?

Contrary to some popular conceptions, God doesn't have a fire burning now in some place termed "hell" where sinners go at death. Hell happens when this earth is turned into a lake of fire (2 Peter 3:9-13). The wicked don't somehow plummet into hell at the moment of death. God waits to carry out His sentence on the day of final judgment at the end of the 1,000 years (Revelation 20:9-15).

"The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment until the day of judgment."

—2 Peter 2:9, margin.

He also subjects our planet to the purifying fire.

"The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for THE DAY OF JUDGMENT and destruction of ungodly men."

—2 Peter 3:7.

God never planned for any human being to end his or her life in the fires of hell. But when people refuse to break with Satan and hold on to their sins, they must finally receive the consequences of their choices.

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.'"

—Matthew 25:41.

According to Jesus, when will hell burn?

"The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be AT THE END OF THE AGE [WORLD, KJV]. The Son of Man will send out his ANGELS, and they will WEED OUT of his kingdom EVERYTHING THAT CAUSES SIN AND ALL WHO DO EVIL. THEY WILL THROW THEM INTO THE FIERY FURNACE, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

—Matthew 13:39-43.

The weeds, the evil-doers, aren't burned until the end of the world. Before this sentence is carried out, the whole universe must be assured that God has been fair in his dealings with every human being. In the great controversy going on between Christ and Satan, Satan has been attempting to prove to the universe that the way of sin is the better way; Jesus has been demonstrating that the way of obedience is the key to a more satisfying life. This demonstration will culminate in the judgment of Satan, his angels, and the wicked "at the end of the world."

At the close of the 1,000 years, after the angels have opened the records to reveal the part that each person has played in this great drama, God will throw Satan, death, and hell, along with everyone whose name is "not found written in the book of life . . . into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

According to the next verse, Revelation 21:1, after God cleanses the earth from sin with fire, He creates "a new heaven and a new earth."

How Long Will Hell Burn?

Many believers have assumed that the fires of hell last forever, resulting in eternal torment. Take, for example, the picture of hell once painted by Jonathan Edwards:

“Hell is now a place of torment where Almighty God blows the flames of fire through you forever. You cry for mercy and jingle the chains of your misery, but God sits defiant, grim and wrathful upon His throne, His jaw set, enjoying the torture of the damned.”

Few believers today take much comfort in this gruesome depiction of a wrathful God. But many still accept the idea of an eternal hell because they’ve been told that’s what the Bible teaches. Let’s look carefully at texts which describe God’s treatment of sin and sinners.

“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be PUNISHED WITH EVERLASTING DESTRUCTION and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”

—2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9.

Please note that “everlasting destruction” is not the same as “everlasting torment.” It simply means, a destruction that lasts forever, an eternal death. The effect of everlasting destruction is everlasting death. Look at what Jesus Himself said about hell:

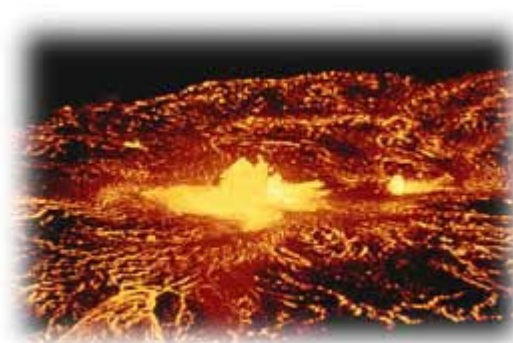
“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

—Matthew 10:28.

According to Jesus, both soul and body are killed, destroyed in hell. In His Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus talked about the fate of humanity at the end of the age, He spoke of the narrow gate “that leads to life,” and the broad road “that leads to destruction” (Matthew 7:13,14).

In the most well-known text in the Bible, John 3:16, Jesus explains that God “gave His one and only Son,” that those who believe might not “perish, but have everlasting life.” Two fates are contrasted: everlasting life and perishing.

From these passages of Scripture, we must conclude that hell results in the death of the wicked. That is, in fact, what clear statements throughout Scripture tell us. “The wicked will be cut off” (Psalm 37:28), they “will perish” (2 Peter 2:12), “they will vanish—vanish like smoke” (Psalm 37:20), they “will be completely cut off from among his people” (Acts 3:23).



The apostle Peter spoke of the day of judgment and the “destruction of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). The apostle Paul said of those who’d become enemies of Christ: “Their destiny is destruction” (Philippians 3:19). Scholars tell us that the Greek word translated “destruction,” is the strongest word that could be used to mean utter loss of existence.

The purpose of the final punishment, the lake of fire, is to rid the universe of sin, not to preserve sin forever. It is extremely hard to imagine that the Christ who wept over the fate of stubborn Jerusalem and who forgave those who put Him to death, would be able to spend

eternity watching over the agonies of the damned. The Bible assures us that hell definitely has an ending:

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and EVERY EVILDOER will be stubble, and that day that is coming WILL SET THEM ON FIRE, . . . THEY WILL BE ASHES UNDER THE SOLES OF YOUR FEET.”

—Malachi 4:1, 3.

The wicked will not burn throughout eternity. The fire will reduce them to ashes, resulting in eternal separation from God. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), not eternal life in hell-fire.

At the end of the 1,000 years, every sinner, inspired by the devil, makes one last determined effort to defeat God and capture the New Jerusalem (Revelation 20:7-10). It’s then that God rains fire down from the skies and eliminates Satan, sin, and those who persist in holding on to their sins.

“Fire came down from heaven and DEVoured them.”

—Revelation 20:9.

The point is utter, complete destruction. According to Jesus, this fire is “unquenchable” (Matthew 3:12). No fire brigade will be able to put it out until it has done its work of complete destruction.

God promises that, out of this cleansing fire, a purified new earth will emerge as the home of the saved:

“The past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes. ‘Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. . . . I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.’”

—Isaiah 65:16-19.

What a day that will be! Every cause for heartache will have vanished. God will erase the wounds of sin from every heart and “the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” Our happiness will be complete, and Jesus’ heart can again expand with joy over His people.

“Forever” In Scripture

Now let’s turn to several texts which, to some, seem to suggest an eternally-burning hell. Many believers find the idea of endless torment abhorrent, but see no way around it because of the way certain texts have been interpreted.

We have already seen that the “eternal punishment” Jesus speaks of in Matthew 25:46 is not unending burning, but “everlasting destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The punishment and its effect are indeed “everlasting”—they result in everlasting death.

Another scripture that troubles people is Matthew 25:41 where Jesus speaks of “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Doesn’t “eternal” here suggest hell is forever? Well, let’s examine the same phrase in other passages.

Jude 7 presents Sodom and Gomorrah “as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.” Obviously those cities aren’t still burning. But the fire WAS eternal in the sense that it resulted in permanent destruction. 2 Peter 2:6 clearly points out that the Eternal God “condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.” The ungodly of Sodom and Gomorrah are not still in agony over in the Holy Land. The cities and their inhabitants were reduced to ashes long ago. And yet the fire that burned them is “eternal” in its consequences—permanent destruction. Remember the distinction: eternal means permanent *punishment*, not *punishing*.

Because the book of Revelation uses such vivid, symbolic language, some of its passages have been misunderstood. For example, Revelation 14:11 says of the lost, “the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.” This certainly sounds like endless suffering. But, again, let’s let Scripture interpret Scripture.

The prophet Isaiah used the same language in speaking of God’s judgment against wicked Edom. He said, “Her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever” (Isaiah 34:9,10). The land of Edom is not still burning today. The fire went out a long time ago. God was using poetic language to emphasize the thoroughness, the utter destruction, involved in this judgment.

Exodus 21:6 in the KJV speaks of a servant’s having his ear drilled through as a sign that he was to serve his master “forever.” In this case “forever” would be as long as the servant’s life would last, so the NIV translates the word “forever” as “for life.” Jonah, who spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale (Matthew 12:40), reports that he was there “forever” (Jonah 2:6). No doubt three days in the slimy darkness did seem like forever.

So we must be careful to understand how and when Scripture uses symbolic, poetic language. The smoke ascending forever from the lake of fire is a vivid way of expressing eternal destruction. Revelation 21:8 tells us plainly that the lake which burns with fire and brimstone “is the second death.” Hell has an ending. The wicked are consumed; they die; they perish; they are destroyed.

Why Must There Be a Hell at All?

In the beginning God created a perfect world. But sin came in and brought disaster, decay, and death. If you returned home some evening and found your house ransacked and wrecked, would you leave it that way forever? Of course not. You would sweep out the dirt and rubbish, clean the place from top to bottom, and throw away furniture ruined beyond repair. God will do the same. He will take care of the wreckage and pollution of sin once and for all, creating a new earth in its place.

But God faces a serious problem because sin not only wrecked the physical world, it also infected people. Sin damaged our relationship with Him and with each other. Humanity continues to be plagued by child abuse, terrorism, pornography, and a thousand other cancers of the soul. God must someday destroy sin, because sin is destroying people. God's dilemma is this: how to eliminate the deadly virus of sin from the world and yet not destroy all the people infected by it? His solution was to take on the virus in His own body; He allowed the cancer of sin to destroy Him at the cross. As a result:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and PURIFY US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.”

—1 John 1:9.

God offers His solution to the sin problem freely to everyone. But the sad fact is, some won't take the cure. Some insist on clinging to the disease of sin and remain riddled by it. And God will not force people to choose His way of eternal life. Those who reject His solution will finally be consumed by the disease. The real reason for hell is this:

“For I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me.”

—Isaiah 65:12.

Cut off from Jesus, the Source of Life, by their own choices, the wicked will discover that the only alternative is eternal death.

What Will It Cost to Be Lost?

Even though the Scriptures do not teach that the fire of hell results in endless suffering, it does give us a glimpse of what a terrible experience it is to be lost.

“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled. . . . This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. THEY WILL BE punished with everlasting destruction and SHUT OUT FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD.”
—2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

The wicked are going to miss out. They’re going to miss out on eternal life, “shut out from the presence of the Lord.” That’s why there is such “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13). What a horror it will be to realize that the joy of eternal life with God has slipped through your hands, that you’ll never, ever experience the bliss of perfect, loving relationships throughout the ages.

When Christ hung on the cross with the world’s sins separating Him from the Father, He must have felt the agony of the eternally lost. As the wicked look into the black void ahead of them, they see only eternal destruction. They must die with no hope of a second resurrection. At the same time they see how they repeatedly pushed Christ away when He came near with overtures of love. In the end they fall to their knees and acknowledge God’s justice and His love (Revelation 15:4; Philippians 2:10, 11).

No wonder Bible writers urgently press on us the weight of our choices and the claims of Christ.

“We urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, NOW is the time of God’s favor, NOW is the day of salvation.”
—2 Corinthians 6:1-2.

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”
—John 3:17.

I can think of no greater tragedy than someone wasting the priceless sacrifice of Jesus by choosing to be lost. No wonder Jesus said,

“I tell you that . . . there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”
—Luke 15:7.

The alternatives facing us are starkly clear: eternal destruction—an eternity excluded from the presence of God, or an eternal friendship with Christ that fulfills our deepest longings. Which do you choose for yourself? Why not discover your destiny in Christ today?

Dear Father of mercy, love, and justice: I am so thankful Jesus loves me and gave His life for me. Help me just now to place myself on the side of salvation and life everlasting, and not on the side of eternal death. Prepare me to be one of those who kneel in adoration at the feet of Jesus when He is crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. Please forgive my sins, and make me true to You and obedient to Your Word and to all Your commandments. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson **24**
**When a Person
Dies...What Then?**

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- **Facing Death Unafraid**
- **How God Made Us**
- **What Happens When a Person Dies?**
- **Are We Immortal Now?**
- **Facing the Death of a Loved One**



When a Person Dies...What Then?

We cringe when a child first asks, “What does it mean to die?” We shrink from talking about or even thinking about death. We not only fear dying, but we also rebel at the thought of someone we love dying. Death is the common enemy of people everywhere.

So what are the answers to the hard questions about death? Are people born only to die? Is death the end of the story? Or is there life after death? What is the experience of those in the grave? Can we help them? Can we talk with them? Will we ever see our dead loved ones again? Just where are the dead?

Conflicting voices clamor to give us the answers. New Age channelers teach that the spirits who channel messages to them are dead beings who have evolved to a higher state. Hindus teach reincarnation into a whole series of lifetimes in which we work off our bad karma and keep progressing to a greater degree of perfection. Buddhists believe in the god within us that enlightens us and moves us into a higher state. Atheists deny all hope of a future life and declare that death is the eternal end of everything. Many Christians believe that the dead are not really dead—that they go to heaven, hell, or some intermediate place of conscious existence.

In a matter so important, so universal, so packed with emotion, where can we learn the truth about what happens when we die? The answer is in the Bible, where the God who knows all about life and death will instruct us with comforting messages of hope.

Facing Death Unafraid

All of us at certain moments, perhaps right after the passing of a friend or loved one, have felt that emptiness in the pit of our stomachs, that lonely feeling that sweeps over us, as we catch a glimpse of the end of life. But fortunately, part of Christ’s mission on earth was to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:15). *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

In the Bible, Jesus answers clearly all our questions about death, resurrection, and a future life. To understand from the Word of God the real truth about death, let’s start at the beginning and see how our Creator made us.

How God Made Us

“The LORD God formed the man [adam, Hebrew] from the dust of the ground [adamah, Hebrew].”

—Genesis 2:7.

The Creator could have made the first man from some celestial or supernatural substance, but He didn't. He fashioned Adam from “the dust of the ground.” After God had combined the desired elements of earth to form Adam's brain, bones, and body, His creative energy gave life to the inert form. It took something more to transform that perfect body into a living soul—and that something more was “the breath of life.”

“The LORD God formed the man from the DUST OF THE GROUND and breathed into his nostrils THE BREATH OF LIFE, and the man became A LIVING BEING [SOUL].”

—Genesis 2:7.

As God breathed into Adam, life began to flow from God through the complex network of his nervous system. His muscles expanded and contracted; his heart and lungs moved in rhythm. The combination of the body and “the breath of life” made man “a living being,” “a living soul” (KJV).

Note that the Bible does not say Adam received a soul—rather it says that “man became a living soul.”

So we might write the human equation like this:

“Dust of Ground” + “Breath of Life” = “A Living Soul”
Lifeless Body + Breath from God = A Living Being

Each of us has a body, intelligence, memory, a reasoning mind, a conscience, and a will. We have one personality and one character. So we're one whole entity, not two or more distinct parts thrown together. Just as long as we continue to breathe, we will be a living human being, a living soul.

What Happens When a Person Dies?

At death the reverse of the creative process described in Genesis 2:7 takes place:

“And the DUST returns to the ground it came from, and the SPIRIT [BREATH OF LIFE] returns to God who gave it.”

—Ecclesiastes 12:7.

The Bible often uses the Hebrew words for “breath” and “spirit” interchangeably. When people die, their body becomes “dust” and the “spirit” or “breath of life” returns to God, its source. But what happens to the soul?

“As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, . . . every LIVING SOUL belongs to me. . . . THE SOUL WHO SINS IS THE ONE WHO WILL DIE.”

—Ezekiel 18:3-4.

The soul dies! It is not now immortal—it can perish. The previous two scriptures show that the equation derived from Genesis 2:7, when God made us, reverses itself at death.

**“Dust of Earth” — “Breath of Life” = “A Dead Soul”
Lifeless Body — Breath from God = A Dead Being**
(Think of the — as an equivalent to “without.”)

Death is the cessation of life, a blackout of spirit, soul, and body. The body disintegrates to dust, and the breath, or spirit, goes back to God. We are living beings in life, a living soul, but in death only a corpse, a dead soul. When God takes back the breath of life He gave to us, our soul dies.

But thank God, the story doesn't end here. With Christ there is hope. But before entering into a discussion of that hope, let's first examine the question:

How Much Does a Dead Person Know?

After death the brain disintegrates; it can't know, comprehend, or remember anything.

***“No one remembers you [Lord] when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?”
—Psalm 6:5.***

All human emotions cease at death.

***“Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.”
—Ecclesiastes 9:6.***

The dead are not aware of anything that takes place. They have absolutely no contact with the living:

***“For the living know that they will die, but THE DEAD KNOW NOTHING; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. . . . Enjoy life . . . for IN THE GRAVE, where you are going, THERE IS NEITHER WORKING NOR PLANNING NOR KNOWLEDGE NOR WISDOM.”
—Ecclesiastes 9:5, 9, 10.***

Death is like a dreamless sleep—in fact, 54 times the Bible calls death a “sleep.” The psalmist said, “I will sleep in death” (Psalm 13:3). Jesus also taught that death is like a sleep. He said to His disciples:

***“Our friend LAZARUS HAS FALLEN ASLEEP; but I am going there to wake him up.’ His disciples replied, ‘Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.’ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, ‘LAZARUS IS DEAD.’”
—John 11:11-14.***

Lazarus was in the early stages of decay, having been dead for four days before Jesus arrived. But when the Son of God came to the tomb, He proved that it is as easy for God to raise the dead as for us to awaken a sleeping companion.

It's a great comfort to know that our deceased loved ones are “asleep,” resting peacefully in Jesus. The tunnel of death, which we ourselves may someday pass through, is a quiet, peaceful sleep.

God's way is the best way. Suppose that a godly mother were to go to heaven at death. According to some popular teachings she would be obliged to look down from heaven to this earth. If she had a wayward son, she might see him as a hopeless alcoholic, or as an addict dying of AIDS. Or, suppose that her husband had preceded her in death. As is commonly believed, if her husband had been a wicked man, she could look over into hell and see him tormented in the everlasting flames. Salvation in such circumstances might offer more pain than joy. Thank God that death is like a sound, tranquil sleep.

Does God Forget Those Who Sleep In Death?

The sleep of death is not the end of the story. At the tomb of His friend Lazarus, Jesus said to Martha:

“I AM THE RESURRECTION and the life. HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL LIVE, even though he dies.”

—John 11:25.

Those who die in Christ sleep in the grave—but they still have a bright future beyond it. Our infinitely skillful Creator preserves the complete picture, the DNA pattern if you please, of every individual He has made. The One who counts every hair on our heads and holds us in the palm of His hand will not forget.

Job had confidence in God’s unerring memory. He expressed the hope of living again:

“If only you would HIDE ME IN THE GRAVE! . . . If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I WILL WAIT FOR MY RENEWAL TO COME. YOU WILL CALL AND I WILL ANSWER YOU; you will long for the creature your hands have made.”

—Job 14:13-15.

On resurrection day, the tunnel of death will seem like a brief rest. The dead are not aware of time passing. Those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour, will be awakened from sleep by His wonderful voice coming down to earth.

The hope of resurrection has a companion: the hope of a heavenly home, “the hope that is stored up for you in heaven” (Colossians 1:5). The Bible is full of advertisements for that perfect home in the Father’s house. Its inhabitants cheerfully “obey God’s commandments,” and “remain faithful to Jesus” (Revelation 12:17, 14:12). God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4).

Those who love God don’t have to fear death. Beyond it lies an eternity of real, physical, joyful, fulfilling life with God. Jesus holds “the keys of death” (Revelation 1:18). Without Christ, death would be a one-way street ending in oblivion, the abyss that lies at the end of the road of sin. But Christ can unlock the grave. With Christ there is hope: a bright, radiant hope.

Are We Immortal Now?

The Bible never once describes the soul as *immortal*—that is, *not subject to death*. In the beginning, Adam's heritage as a created son of God was not death, but eternal life. Had Adam remained obedient to the will of God, he would never have died. But when Adam and Eve sinned, they forfeited their right to life, and by disobedience became subject to death. Their sin infected the entire human race (Romans 5:12). Since "the soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4), people are now all *mortal*—*subject to death*.

The Hebrew and Greek words for "soul," "spirit," and "breath" occur in the Bible 1,700 times, and not once is the human soul, spirit, or breath referred to as now being immortal. Nor is there any hint in the Bible that humans have any conscious existence apart from the body.

At the present time God alone possesses immortality.

"God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, WHO ALONE IS IMMORTAL."

—1 Timothy 6:15, 16.

Scripture makes it clear that people in this life are mortal: subject to death. But when Jesus returns, our nature will undergo a radical change.

"Listen, I tell you a mystery: WE WILL NOT ALL SLEEP, but WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, AT THE LAST TRUMPET. For the trumpet will sound, THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED imperishable, AND WE WILL BE CHANGED. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and THE MORTAL WITH IMMORTALITY. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'DEATH HAS BEEN SWALLOWED UP in victory.'"

—1 Corinthians 15:51-54.

As human beings, we are not now immortal. But by faith in Jesus we can now claim the promise of immortality. The Christian's assurance is that he or she will gain immortality when Jesus comes again a second time.

The certainty of the promise of immortality was demonstrated when Jesus burst open His tomb.

"Our Savior, Christ JESUS, who HAS DESTROYED DEATH and HAS BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT through the gospel."

—2 Timothy 1:10.

The teaching that we are now immortal lies behind the belief in an eternally burning hell. Both the immortality of the soul and an eternally burning hell are ideas derived from Satan's lie to Eve in Eden, when he promised, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). God's perspective on human destiny is clear: eternal death for those who reject Christ and cling to their sins, or immortality as a gift when Jesus comes for those who have accepted Him as Saviour.

Facing the Death of a Loved One

The fears that we naturally struggle with in the face of death become especially acute when a loved one dies. The loneliness and sense of loss can be overwhelming, and we all have to go through a grieving process. Some feel the separation from a loved one so keenly that they try to make contact with their dead loved ones. They can fall under the influence of spiritist mediums or New Age channelers who claim they can communicate with the dead.

But the Bible specifically warns us against trying to ease the pain of death in this way:

“When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?”

—Isaiah 8:19.

“Consult the Message and the Counsel of God!”

—Verse 20, Moffatt.

The real solution to the anguish caused by separation from a loved one is the comfort that only Christ gives. After all, it's Christ, not some medium, who holds our loved one in the palm of His hand. It's Christ the Creator who holds the blueprint for that individual.

Spending time communicating with Christ is the healthiest way to grow through the grieving process. Slowly His perspective sinks into our minds; His promises shine on our gloomy thoughts. Remember that your loved one is asleep, and a night's sleep seems like just a few moments to the sleeper. The next conscious impression that comes to those who sleep in Christ will be the sounds of the second coming.

Your loved ones who rest in Jesus will rise in the “resurrection of life” when Jesus returns once more. On that glorious day, loved ones and friends who are believers will all be caught up together to meet Christ in the air.

God is planning some wonderful reunions. Children will be returned to their ecstatic parents. Husbands and wives will melt into each other's arms. All of life's cruel separations will be swallowed up in a crescendo of reunions rising into the sky. Truly, “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Facing Death Unafraid

There's no doubt about it, death is an enemy—it robs us of almost everything. But the one thing it can't take from us is Christ, and Christ can put everything back together again. Death will not always reign in this world. The devil, the wicked, death, and the grave will perish in “the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death” (Revelation 20:14).

In the meantime here are four simple suggestions for facing death unafraid:

1. Live a life of hopeful trust in Christ, and you will be prepared for death at any moment.
2. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, be obedient to Christ's commandments, and you will be prepared for a second life in which you will never die.

3. Think of death as a short sleep from which Jesus' voice will awaken you when He comes a second time.
4. Cherish the assurance Jesus gives us of a heavenly home with Him for all eternity. Bible truth releases a person from the fear of death because it reveals Jesus, the One whom even death could not conquer. When Jesus comes into our lives, He floods our hearts with peace:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

—John 14:27.

Jesus also makes it possible for us to cope with the tragedy of losing a loved one. Jesus walked through “the valley of the shadow of death”; He knows about the dark nights we go through. He died and rose from the grave to give us an unshakable hope.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that BY HIS DEATH he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and FREE THOSE WHO ALL THEIR LIVES WERE HELD IN SLAVERY BY THEIR FEAR OF DEATH.”

—Hebrews 2:14, 15.

Dr. James Simpson, the great physician who developed anesthesia, experienced a terrible loss when his eldest child died. He grieved deeply as any parent would. But then he found his way to hope. On his beloved child's grave he erected a small obelisk pointing like a spire toward the heavens. And on it he carved these three words Jesus spoke concerning His resurrection: “Nevertheless, I live.”

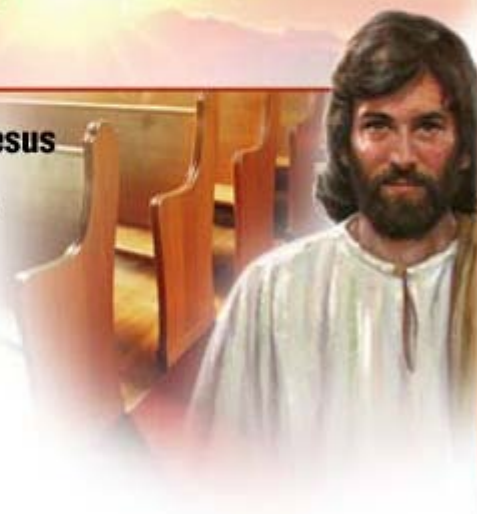
That says it all. Personal tragedy may seem to blot out the sky sometimes; nevertheless, Jesus lives! Our hearts may be breaking; nevertheless, Jesus lives!

In Christ we have hope of life after death. He is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), and He promises, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). When Christ comes again He gives us immortality. We will never again live under the shadow of death, for we have eternal life. Have you discovered this great hope that we can cherish in our darkest moments? If you have never accepted Jesus as your Saviour, will you do it just now?

God and Father of the living and the dead: I am grateful for Your justice and mercy in dealing with very weak, mortal human beings. I love You, and I long for the day, when by Your grace, I will receive immortality with all Your children. Help me to trust You completely and to believe the Bible with all my heart. Hasten the day when I will be united with my loved ones in the great resurrection morning. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Lesson **25** **DISCOVER** *online* **Can I Find God's Church Today?**

- **The Church Established by Jesus**
- **The Drama of Satan's Defeat**
- **The Christian Church in
Conflict With Satan**
- **God's Church in Our Day**



Can I Find God's Church Today?

For generations Roman Catholics and Protestants have been waging a violent war on each other in Northern Ireland, even though both swear allegiance to the Bible. Since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, Orthodox Christians, Catholic Christians, and Moslems have been slaughtering each other, often in the name of their religious beliefs. For centuries the tension in the explosive Middle East has been fueled by Jewish and Moslem beliefs, both of which have their origins in the Old Testament Scriptures.

It's no wonder people these days are gun-shy of anyone shouting for one truth, one faith, and calling for absolute allegiance. But at the same time, we're aching for a place to stand, a truth to believe in completely.

Some today keep urging us to "find your own individual truth," and they assure us that "god" is in some inner recess of the heart. But it's not very comforting to just make up the truth as you go along. When you come right down to it, it would be frightening to believe that there's no truth on the horizon bigger than our individual selves.

That's our dilemma today. We ache for a meaningful place to make a stand in the world—and we are afraid of finding it inhabited by fanatics.

Fortunately God has prepared a special message for us in these times. God has frequently given special messages to meet the needs of different generations: a message to help Adam and Eve after sin ruined their world, a message to the world before the cataclysm of the flood, messages for Israel when Assyria or Babylon threatened.

Jesus came with a special message for His generation, and He has a special message for our day that gives us a place to stand. We find it in the Bible in the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation. Chapters 12 and 14 of Revelation summarize God's special message for us today. In this DISCOVER guide and the guide that follows, we will take a look at that message.

The Church Established By Jesus

The life and teachings of Jesus established unity of belief and close fellowship in the apostolic church that He founded. Apostolic Christians knew who they were and lived out their faith confidently. They formed an intimate relationship with the risen Christ. Paul pictured that close bond as a marriage relationship:

“I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.”

—2 Corinthians 11:2. *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

According to Paul, the church is a pure woman, the bride of Christ. A woman in her freshness and purity as a bride is a fitting symbol of Christ’s beloved church.

In the Old Testament the same metaphor is used to describe Israel, God’s chosen people. God said to Israel: “as a bride you loved me” (Jeremiah 2:2), and “I am your husband” (Jeremiah 3:14). Though the term “church” is not used in the Old Testament of your Bible, the New Testament speaks of Israel as “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV).

In the book of Revelation, John also speaks of the church as a woman:

“A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.”

—Revelation 12:1.

The description of this woman indicates that John has in mind the transition from God’s people, Israel, in the Old Testament to His church in the New Testament.

1. The woman is “clothed with the sun.” This suggests a church shining like the noonday sun, because of being clothed with Christ’s glorious presence. Jesus, “the light of the world” (John 8:12), shines through the members of His church, and they in turn become “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

2. The woman has “the moon under her feet.” The moon represents the reflected light of the gospel in the sacrifices and ceremonies of God’s people in the Old Testament. The moon being “under her feet” suggests that the reflected light of the Gospel of the Old Testament has been superseded by the reality of Christ’s life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

3. The woman has “a crown of twelve stars on her head.” Stars fittingly represent the twelve apostles, men of noble character whose testimony about Jesus shines brilliantly to this very day.

Clearly, John is describing the transition from God’s Old Testament people to the Christian church of the New Testament that Jesus established.

The sun, moon, and stars—used to describe the characteristics of this woman—emphasize the light-giving ministry of the Christian church, and its primary role of sharing the Good News.

The Drama of Satan's Defeat

The appearance of the woman sets the stage for a great drama:

“She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.”

—Revelation 12:2-6.

Three key figures participate in this drama:

- 1. The woman**, already identified as God's church.
- 2. The male child** born to this woman “is snatched up to God and to his throne” and will someday “rule all nations.” Jesus Christ is the only child ever born in this world who has been taken up to God's throne and will someday rule all nations.
- 3. The dragon** representing the devil, or Satan.

“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. THE GREAT DRAGON was hurled down—that ancient serpent, CALLED THE DEVIL, OR SATAN, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

—Revelation 12:7-9.

The picture becomes clear once we understand the symbols. When the devil and his angels “lost their place in heaven,” they were “hurled to the earth.” When Jesus was born in this world nearly two thousand-years ago, the devil tried to kill Jesus, the male child, as soon as He was born. He failed, and Jesus was “snatched up” to God's throne. Satan then set out to annihilate the Christian church that Christ established. But Satan has failed to destroy either Christ or His church.

John saw glimpses of this great conflict between Christ and Satan raging on this earth. As the battle reaches a climax at Christ's crucifixion, John hears a voice shout from heaven:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.”

—Revelation 12:10; (compare John 12:31, KJV).

Jesus won a deciding victory over Satan at the cross. At the cross Jesus confirmed the certainty of the plan of salvation. God provided “power” for resisting the cunning of Satan, “the kingdom of God” was made secure, and the Saviour's “authority” to be our High Priest and King was confirmed.

“Now have come the salvation” declares that history’s crowning event has arrived. The birth of Christ, the Saviour of the world, has taken place (verse 5). In spite of Satan’s fierce temptations, Jesus has lived His sinless life. Jesus has died and emerged from the grave a victor over sin and death (verse 10). Satan has been forever defeated (verses 7-9). The cross is magnified in its full power (verse 10-11).

The announcement, “now has come the salvation,” interests not only John, but the entire universe:

“Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

—Revelation 12:12.

All heaven celebrated Jesus’ victory. Christ destroyed any claim Satan may have once had to a place in heaven, and a defeated Satan lost forever his claim to our world. In lock step with Christ the Christian church marched forward in triumph.

The Christian Church In Conflict With Satan

Before Jesus ascended to heaven He established the Christian church (symbolized by the woman). He poured His life into it and sacrificed His life for it. Christ's death on the cross gave the Christian church the power to defeat Satan.

“They [the Christian church] overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

—Revelation 12:11.

Christ is now able to give His power, the fruit of His victory, to His church. We can conquer territory formerly belonging to Satan because of the power of the cross. Just as Jesus decisively triumphed over Satan at the cross, He now continues to triumph over Satan through His church. Three characteristics mark the triumphant church during the passing centuries of the Christian era:

1. “They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb.” Jesus was caught up to God's throne so He could make His blood effective in the lives of his followers. He can clear the record of our sins and save us through His shed blood (1 John 1:7). The life-giving blood of a risen Saviour also gives us power to live a healthy Christian life day by day (1 Peter 1:18-20). (For a full explanation of the meaning of Christ's blood, see guide 11, section 5.)

2. “They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” “The blood of the Lamb” made them willing to die for Christ's cause; they did not “shrink from death.” The impact of the cross enabled the martyrs to retain a sense of mission in the face of adversity. God had suffered greatly so they were willing to suffer.

Even children made the ultimate sacrifice. A story is told of a Christian mother who was thrown to the lions in a Roman arena because she gave her ultimate allegiance to Christ and not the state. Her young daughter had to look on the cruel scene. But instead of shrinking back in horror, she felt a fervent devotion welling up inside. As the lions attacked her mother, she stood up and cried, “I too am a Christian.” Roman officials arrested her on the spot and hurled her to the hungry beasts.

Tertullian, a church leader in the second century, said of Christians: “The working of such love puts a brand upon us, for ‘See,’ say the heathen, ‘how they love one another, and are ready to lay down their lives for each other.’”

Christians who kept biblical truth in the face of death are an inspiring example. Here's an account of the ordeal of believers who insisted on practicing baptism by immersion as taught in Scripture:

“In 1160 a company of Paulicians (Baptists) entered Oxford. Henry II ordered them to be branded on the forehead with hot irons, publicly whipped them through the streets of the city, cut their garments short at the girdles, and turned them into open country. The villages were not to afford them any shelter or food and they perished a lingering death from cold and hunger.”—Moore, *Earlier and Later Nonconformity in Oxford*, page 12.

3. “They overcame him [Satan] . . . by the word of their testimony.” Not just the words, but the word of their testimony—the testimony of their lives, their living witness to the power of Jesus and His gospel. During the darkest hours of the Christian era a whole army of Christians—from the early church fathers to the Protestant reformers—overcame the worst the devil could hurl at them, simply by the dynamic witness of their lives.

Revelation 12:11 pictures the victorious Christian church. It depicts a church filled with overcomers: apostles, martyrs, reformers, and other faithful Christians. The testimony of their kindness, courage, faithfulness, and triumph has thundered down the centuries and moved the world. Since Satan failed to destroy the Son of God when He lived on earth in the flesh, he now seeks to destroy Christ’s church. The church receives both encouragement and warning:

“When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.”

—Revelation 12:13-16.

Just as predicted, during the Dark Ages of the Christian era, Satan sent “a river” of persecution “to sweep” the church “away with the torrent.” This is spiritual warfare. It’s deadly serious. Satan wants to destroy Christ’s influence by wiping out His church and He uses every trick his evil genius can devise. The dragon represents Satan primarily. But remember that Satan uses human institutions in his role as dragon to attack God’s people. He used the Roman king Herod in an attempt to murder the Christ child as soon as He was born. He worked through Christ’s jealous religious rivals to stalk and harass the Saviour, and finally secure His execution on the cross. But Satan’s apparent victory turned into Christ’s greatest triumph. Furious over his defeat at the cross, Satan turned his wrath against the church that Jesus established.

During the decades after Christ’s crucifixion, thousands met their death in the Roman Colosseum, in arenas, city squares, dungeons, and desert hideaways. At first secular authorities initiated this persecution.

But after the death of the apostles a gradual change crept into the church. During the second, third, and fourth centuries, many in the church began to modify, and sometimes even reject, the truths Christ and His apostles had taught. Some apostate leaders even began to persecute those Christians who insisted on the purity of New Testament beliefs.

Scholars estimate that about 50 million of the faithful perished. In an unsuccessful attempt to drown out the church and completely destroy it, the devil sent “a river” of persecution and false doctrine “to sweep her [the church] away with the torrent.” “But the earth helped the woman by . . . swallowing the river” of persecution and false doctrine.

During these medieval persecutions, the true church withdrew from the apostate leadership and took refuge in “the place prepared for her in the desert.” Fortunately God’s faithful people had “a retreat prepared [for her] by God, in which she is to be fed and kept safe for one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Revelation 12:6, Amplified New Testament, brackets in the original). This prediction was fulfilled during the 1260 years of persecution from A.D. 538 to 1798 (remember that a day often stands for a year in symbolic Bible prophecy, see Ezekiel 4:6).

During these dark centuries, faithful Bible-believing Christians found refuge wherever they could; for example, in the Waldensian valleys of western Italy and eastern France, and in the Celtic church of the British Isles. Men such as Patrick of Ireland, Columba of Iona, and Aidan of Lindisfarne preached the divine Word of God in secret centers of learning where they trained young men to share the pure gospel in a time of ignorance, superstition and intolerance. (For full details about the wilderness church and its 1260 years of trouble and controversy, be sure to enroll in the *God Cares Daniel* and the *God Cares Revelation* courses when you complete the DISCOVER series.)

Passing over century after century of church history, as outlined accurately in Revelation, we come right down to our own day—to the true church of Christ since 1798.

God's Church In Our Day

As might be expected, the dragon is still angry with God's people. The great unseen war continues. In fact, Satan makes his greatest attack on the church just before Jesus comes. Note the last act in the drama at the conclusion of the prophecy:

"Then the dragon [the devil] was enraged at the woman [God's church] and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

—Revelation 12:17.

This prophecy focuses on our day. Satan is enraged; he wages war on "the rest of" the woman's "offspring"—God's contemporary people. Notice that the final Christian church has certain identifying marks: they "obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

1. These last-day believers "hold to the testimony of Jesus." Clinging faithfully to the pure doctrines of the Word of God, they testify for Jesus through dynamic Christian living. They have discovered that the great truths of the Bible awaken love and devotion to Christ. A caring people, they want to share with others the joys of living "in Christ."

2. These last-day Christians are a people of prophecy. Receiving "the testimony of Jesus Christ" enabled John to write the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1-3). The final group of believers receive a similar gift: direct testimonies from God through an earthly messenger. John defines "the testimony of Jesus" as "the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). Their gift of prophecy focuses their eyes on God's revelation of their mission and their final destiny.

3. These last-day Christians are also identified as "those who obey God's commandments." They not only defend the integrity of the Ten Commandments, they also obey them. "God has poured out His love into [their] hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). God's love produces joyful obedience (Romans 13:8-10).

The apostolic church demonstrated a loyalty to the commandments of God, and these last-day Christians take the same stand: following the example of Christ and the early church in obeying the commandments of God. This greatly provokes our enemy, the dragon. The devil wages war with "the rest of" the woman's "offspring" because they bear witness to a great truth: genuine love for God produces obedient disciples. As Jesus charged:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command."

—John 14:15.

Have you discovered this in your own life? The lives of these last-day Christians show that, in Christ, it's possible to love God with all our hearts and our fellow human beings as ourselves. These qualities, love for God and love for people, sum up God's Ten Commandments (Matthew 22:35-40).

The fourth of those commandments asks us to observe Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as the Sabbath. Since a love for Jesus has imbedded all ten of the commandments in their hearts, these last-day Christians are Sabbath-keepers. The devil has tried in various ways to chip the fourth of the Ten Commandments out of the tables of stone on which God wrote them, but he hasn't been able to remove them from the hearts of faithful believers.

God does have a last-day movement that leads men and women back to obedience to His commandments—one that calls His people back to allegiance to Him. The Sabbath is the symbol that God is both Creator and Lord of this world and of each of our lives. And the Sabbath is at the heart of God’s final appeal to His people in Revelation, chapters 12 to 14.

All the resources of heaven are arrayed behind the last-day Christians described in these chapters. They may seem to be rather isolated in the world, but their prayers call an army of heavenly angels to their side, a living Saviour is their constant companion, and the Holy Spirit works to “strengthen them with power in the inner man.” The promise is sure. They will overcome Satan “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11).

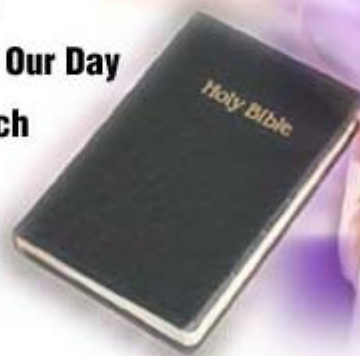
Do you wish to be one of these last-day Christians who “obey God’s commandments” and “hold to the testimony of Jesus”? Why not make that decision just now.

Dear Father: How thankful I am for the clear testimony Scripture gives us about how we can be part of God’s last-day people who overcome. Help me to surrender my life to the everlasting gospel, to keep the commandments and the faith of Jesus. Keep me close to Christ as I live a life of absolute submission, trusting in everlasting grace. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Lesson **26**

DISCOVER
online
**Does God Have a
Special Message for Our Day?**

- Which Religion Saves?
- A Special Message for Our Day
- Christ's Last-Day Church
- The Two Harvests



Does God Have a Special Message for Our Day?

Recent statistics tell us that in the United States alone 240 different religious bodies carry out their work. There are more than 500 around the globe. Protestantism itself has fragmented into more than 200 denominations, and many of these are further sub-divided into various groups. There are, for example, twenty different kinds of Baptists.

An Anglican bishop once said, “Divided Christendom is a source of weakness in the West: in non-Christian lands it is a . . . stumbling block.” This man had in mind the perplexity faced by new believers in Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim lands who, when they decide to follow Christ, must choose between scores of denominations, all competing for their allegiance.

In all this maze of sometimes squabbling, often competing religious bodies, how can someone searching for truth discover a healthy, and genuine religion?

Which Religion Saves?

Ramon Umashankar was born a Brahmin. His elders taught him at an early age that he was a god, and that to realize his divinity he must practice yoga and meditation. But as a teenager, Ramon began to wonder if He could really find God through the various idols worshipped in Hindu temples.

Later Ramon moved to the United States and began examining the Bible and the claims of Christ. He had always respected Jesus for His humility, but now Ramon heard that this Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God. And he noticed that many Christians seemed to have a peace that years of meditation failed to produce. Still, Ramon was determined to find truth in his own Hindu religion.

But then he saw a film on the life of Christ. For the first time he realized that Jesus had experienced suffering and fear as a human being. Previous to this he thought Jesus had somehow used His supernatural powers to escape the pain of crucifixion. But now, he couldn't explain the cross. He wondered: How did this Jesus go through such an ordeal—for sinful men?

As Ramon continued to meditate on Christ's death, he was overwhelmed by such a demonstration of love. He decided to give up his coveted Brahmin status and turn his life over to Jesus, the Saviour. In comparison with Christ's sacrificial love, Ramon said, "Everything else just fell to pieces."

This young Brahmin discovered the central truth of Christianity: Jesus, the Saviour of the world. He is the Way—the only way—of salvation.

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

—**Acts 4:12.** *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

The Bible clearly teaches that we are lost in sin, and thus subject to sin's penalty: death (Romans 6:23). All have sinned (Romans 3:23), so all face death. All of us need to be rescued from sin's condemnation. Jesus is the One—the only One—who can provide that rescue.

"By this gospel you are saved, . . . Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, . . . he was buried, . . . he was raised on the third day."

—**1 Corinthians 15:2-4.**

We are not saved by a religion, nor are we saved by a church. We are saved by Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone.

"Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

—**John 6:40.**

The apostle Peter said to Jesus:

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

—**Matthew 16:16.**

Jesus responded to this confession of faith by saying:

“On this rock I will build my church.”

—Matthew 16:18.

Belief in Jesus Christ is the foundation of genuine religion, the “rock” on which the true church is built. Just as there is only “one God, the Father” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ” our Saviour (1 Corinthians 8:6), so there is only one true religion:

“One Lord, ONE FAITH, one baptism.”

—Ephesians 4:5.

“There shall be ONE FLOCK, and one shepherd.”

—John 10:16

Christianity teaches the truth as revealed in the Word of God. Jesus said,

“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”

—John 5:39.

Does God Have a Special Message for Our Day?

Yes, God does have a special message for last-day Christians. This threefold message appears in Revelation 14:6-16. According to verses 14-16, after these threefold messages have been spread throughout the world, Jesus will come to “harvest” the saved:

“I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one ‘like a son of man’ with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, ‘Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.”

—Revelation 14:14-16.

The proclamation of the messages given by these three angels climaxes with the second coming of Christ. Though Scripture dramatically portrays these three messages through the symbol of three angels, it is God’s people who actually deliver them to the world. Let’s take a careful look at each of the three divine messages.

1. The First Angel’s Message.

“Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”

—Revelation 14:6, 7.

God’s people do not proclaim a new gospel, but “the eternal gospel” to the entire world—“to every nation, tribe, language and people.” Even though God may have a special message in the last days, we must always be careful never to de-emphasize or distort the “eternal gospel” of Jesus Christ. It is the same message of salvation that people in Old Testament times accepted “by faith” (Hebrews 3:16-19; 4:2; 11:1-40); the same teaching that Jesus Himself proclaimed; the same gospel the disciples preached to conquer the world for Christ; the same gospel that has thundered down through the centuries of the Christian era.

The simple, saving gospel of Jesus Christ almost vanished from the church for more than a thousand years during the Dark Ages, but the Reformation revived it, and God’s people preach it around the world today. The first angel proclaims this same gospel message, but it is given in a new setting—a worldwide one—for people living in these last days just before Jesus comes a second time.

Those who accept it find themselves called to “fear God and give him glory [reflect His character].” They show the world God’s character of love, not only by their words, but also by their lives of dynamic witness. They offer a thrilling revelation of what God can do through human beings filled with the Spirit of Christ.

When were these three angels’ messages to be proclaimed throughout the world? When the hour of God’s “judgment has come.” Guide 13 explains that Jesus began the work of His pre-advent judgment in 1844. In that very year, 1844, Jesus inspired people all over the world to begin preaching the message of Revelation 14.

This message calls for us to “worship him who made the heavens, [and] the earth” (Revelation 14:7). God asks us to “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” because “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth” (Exodus 20:8-11). In 1844 when Darwin was propounding the theory of evolution, God was calling people back to worship Him as the Creator. At the very time evolution began to threaten the authority of God’s Word, those preaching the three angels’ messages discovered the seventh-day Sabbath of God’s Word and began to keep it in honor of the Creator of heaven and earth.

2. The Second Angel’s Message.

“A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’”

—Revelation 14:8.

Following the “confusion” of languages at the Tower of Babel, the name Babylon became connected with the Hebrew word *balal*, “to confound.” In Bible prophecy, “Babylon” becomes a vivid symbol of religious confusion.

The second of God’s messages strongly opposes a religion of compromise. Revelation 17 depicts spiritual Babylon—apostate Christianity—as an immoral woman (Verse 5). She stands in contrast to the pure woman of Revelation 12 who represents the true Christian church.

The second angel warns, “*fallen is Babylon the Great.*” The woman who represents Babylon is a fallen woman who “*made all nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.*” The wine of false doctrine has permeated these adulterated forms of Christianity. The message of the second angel calls God’s people to resist the false teachings of an apostate Christianity which obscure the truths of God’s Word.

Babylon represents a mixture of many forms of apostate Christianity. One distortion of the gospel that has permeated a large segment of Christianity is legalism: the belief that we can depend on our own good efforts for salvation. At the other extreme are those who believe in what has been called “cheap grace.” They separate the gospel from its natural result: a life of obedience to Christ.

God calls people to “come out” of Babylon (Revelation 18:4) and into wholehearted devotion to Christ. He wants a people who serve as examples of the power of obedient faith. The Lord summons His people from spiritual Babylon to become genuine disciples, who depend on Christ and follow His teachings in the Scriptures. He asks us to keep the commandments of God through faith in Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

Without scriptural authority Babylon offers a seductive alternative: for example, religious groups who select which Bible teachings must be followed and which discarded. Many today are choosing a form of “lite” Christianity, saying in effect: “Just give me a few greeting card sayings and send me on my way. Don’t cramp my style with any of those non-negotiable commandments from Mt. Sinai.”

Babylon is so dangerous because of the false ideas of God she perpetrates. She distorts the picture of God into caricatures: a vengeful, endlessly demanding Cop in the Sky, or a sentimental Granddaddy who’s too sweet to bother anyone about sin. A healthy church will present a balanced picture of all God’s attributes and show how His justice and mercy, sovereignty and servanthood, omnipotence and restraint, all combine in the truth that God is love. Those who “come out” of Babylon, reject unbiblical teachings and worship God as He is revealed in His Word.

3. The Third Angel's Message.

“A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. . . . There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’ This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.” —Revelation 14:9-12.

The third angel's message demands a decision. It divides the entire world into two groups. On one side stand the apostate Christians who worship *“the beast and his image”* and *“receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand.”* On the other hand stand those who reject the authority of the beast; these are *“the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”*

Note the contrast between the two opposing groups. Those who receive the mark of the beast are compromising worshipers who follow convenient man-made ideas and practices. The “saints” have as their distinguishing traits: “patient endurance,” obedience to “God’s commandments,” and they “remain faithful to Jesus.”

Our advanced *Focus on Prophecy* Bible course presents an in-depth study of the identity of Babylon, and also of the beast, his image, and his mark. In this guide we can examine only briefly the vital importance of this third message.

Christ's Last-Day Church

Have you ever admired a strong, stable Christian, marveled at his or her devotion, patience, and faith, and longed for a similar spiritual experience? God gave his special message for our day in Revelation 14 because it can produce just such an experience.

As discussed in guide 25, Revelation 12:17 identifies last-day Christians as “*those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*” Revelation 14:12 describes this same group as “*saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.*” Let’s summarize the characteristics of last-day Christians.

1. They “hold to the testimony of Jesus.” Even when Satan vents His anger against them, they “remain faithful to Jesus.” Before our Saviour ascended to heaven, He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. He also promised to live continually in the hearts of Christians through faith. Our Saviour wants His light, love, and power to shine out to the world in a special way through God’s last-day church. Their faith is not of their own making, it’s a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). They see Christ more and more clearly in His true character and by grace . . . through faith they become living monuments to the power of an indwelling Christ.

2. They “Keep . . . the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12, KJV), also translated “remain faithful to Jesus” (NIV). The King James Version renders it as they “keep . . . the faith of Jesus.” Last-day Christians need to trust God as Jesus trusted His Father. The faith that Jesus had, the faith that He taught, the faith that He lived, must now fill their hearts. Believers in the last days not only have the truth, they “keep” the truth—they follow it. To them religion is life, belief is correlated with practice, and faith is coupled with obedience. Each one lives out “the faith of Jesus” in his or her life. Christ takes possession of their lives and they live in obedience to the Word of God. Theirs is an experience of *obedient living through faith*. They have discovered the truth that 18th-century author Samuel Johnson observed: “He who hopes to find peace by trusting God must obey Him.”

3. “They remain faithful to Jesus” (NIV) because they have discovered that the great teachings of the Bible, when applied to daily living, produce a dynamic Christian life. They have found that these great Bible truths awaken a love and devotion to Christ who satisfies every need and longing of the human heart.

4. They “obey God’s commandments”—the Ten Commandments, the moral law of God. Because they are people of integrity who love God with all their hearts, they want above all else to obey God’s every wish, His every command. They show their love to God and love to other people by following all the commandments of God, including the fourth commandment that directs us to worship our Creator by honoring Saturday, the seventh-day Sabbath.

5. They share the message of “the eternal gospel” throughout the world (Revelation 14:6). The gospel declares that sin separates people from God, but that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave so that we can experience a saving relationship with Him. The death and resurrection of Jesus establishes a union between God and human beings that becomes our healing strength. Since 1844, when the pre-advent judgment began in heaven, Christ’s last-day church has been calling people everywhere to come out of religious confusion and form a relationship with Jesus based solely on Bible truth.

6. They are driven by a sense of urgency because the angel is about to cry out that “the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe” (Revelation 14:15). The long night of sin and spiritual darkness is almost over, the end of the world is near, and millions still haven’t found Christ. This accounts for their *acute* sense of urgency.

7. They are consumed by their God-given mission. They don't want to keep their wonderful relationship with Christ to themselves. Because "Babylon the Great" is fallen, they plead with those still living in religious confusion, "Come out of her, my people" (Revelation 18:4). They long to share their confidence and their happiness with everyone else. Theirs is a healthy, fruitful fellowship that unites them to Christ and to one another in a great army carrying God's last great message to people in a decaying world.

All this and more unites the hearts of the millions of last-day Christians described in the book of Revelation. Their life of joy leads them to join the apostle John in extending this invitation to you:

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make your joy complete."

—1 John 1:3, 4, margin.

Through His Spirit and through His church, Jesus invites you also to come and surrender everything to Him:

"The Spirit and the bride [church] say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

—Revelation 22:17

The Two Harvests

The three angels' messages culminate when Jesus returns to earth to harvest the saved of all time (Revelation 14:14-16). Jesus gathers all the saved and transports them to His "many mansions" in heaven (John 14:1-3, KJV). He abolishes for all time sin, sickness, misery, and death. The saints begin glorious new lives with Him, each day more exciting than the last, throughout eternity (Revelation 21:1-4).

Jesus will also "harvest" the wicked at His coming.



"Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel . . . called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe.' The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press."

—Revelation 14:17-20.

This will be a tragic time of final destruction. It's an especially sorrowful event for Christ because He must destroy those who refuse to be saved. Jesus "is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Unfortunately some still turn away from Him.

When Jesus comes to reap what He has planted in the world, in which harvest will you be? Will you stand among the ripened grain with the redeemed of all ages (Revelation 14:13-16)? Or will you be among ripened grapes of wrath, the lost, who shrink back from a glorious Christ (Revelation 14:17-20)? Now is the time to decide. Now is the time to discover the day of salvation.

"As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, NOW IS THE TIME OF GOD'S FAVOR, NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION."

—2 Corinthians 6:1, 2.

The issue is clearly set. On the one side, Jesus stands with outstretched nail-pierced hands, urging you to take your stand with the "saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). On the other side are the voices of mere human beings, urging that obedience to the entire Bible and to all the commandments of God is not important.

The crowd in Pilate's judgment hall once faced a strikingly similar issue. On the one hand was Jesus, the Son of man—but also the divine-human God-man. On the other hand was Barabbas, a helpless man, unable to help himself or those in the crowd who witnessed that tragic scene. And yet when the commanding words of Pilate rang through the motley crowd, "Which of the two shall I release unto you?" the multitude of voices thundered back in angry tones, "Barabbas!"

"What then," asked Pilate, "shall I do with Jesus, the so-called Christ?"

With one voice the crowd shouted, "Let Him be crucified!" And so Jesus, the innocent One, was crucified; and Barabbas, the guilty one, went free. (See Matthew 27:20-26, Weymouth translation.)

Whom do you choose today, Barabbas or Jesus? Do you choose to follow man-made ideas and teachings that are contrary to the commandments of God and contrary to the eternal gospel of Jesus? Or do you desire to “obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus”? Remember, He is the One who promises to send His Holy Spirit to solve your every perplexity, to heal your every heartache, and to satisfy your every longing.

Dear Heavenly Father: I want more than anything to kneel before You face-to-face, in adoration and praise. I want to take my stand to be fully on your side. I want to be one of your commandment-keeping followers in these last days. I long for the day when I’ll be with you in your kingdom. I know that is only possible through the great sacrifice of Jesus, Your Son. I accept Your gracious offer, and I ask You to become Lord of my life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.