

# Starting Well

**Book Phrase**

**Duncan Watkinson**

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# Starting Well

By Duncan Watkinson

This booklet has been written to help fulfil the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. We believe that you will benefit from studying this book by yourself, but that you will be blessed even more if you do it in the context of a discipling relationship with another Christian, or together with a small group of believers.

In the process of writing this book, we have drawn from a wide cross section of God's church. We are extremely grateful for the many insights we have received from different sources.

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# 1. Getting started

Getting a good start to anything is helpful, but having the right start to the Christian life can make the difference between an exciting life which brings glory to God and one which just limps along.

Living life as a Christian is challenging and difficult – but the good news is that Almighty God is here to teach you, to help you and to keep you going everyday. The only reason we can even talk about a Christian life is because God loves each of us and wants us to enjoy a relationship with him and his son, Jesus. His love and concern for each of us is shown in **John 3:16**: 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.

God looks on each of us with love and wants the best for us. He does not treat us as we deserve but takes the initiative to reach out to us, whatever our condition and circumstances. The fact that you have opened this page is a sure sign that God is interested in you. He wants you to experience his unconditional love for you and to know about his amazing grace which can transform your life. It is his grace – his love and power at work in you - which will keep you running to the end of the race.<sup>1</sup>

## A. The starting blocks

To get started in this race, two starting blocks have to be positioned well to enable you to leap forward into the Christian life. The starting blocks are the Word of God and prayer.



### 1. The Word of God

This study is based on the bible because the bible records God's words to people of all ages. It shows us God's ways and what he expects from people. Read **2 Timothy 3:16** and fill in the blanks:

*All Scripture is ..... and is useful for .....,  
..... and ..... in righteousness*

'Scripture' simply means 'what is written' and is another word for the bible. The bible is also known as the Word of God, because God caused it to be written. The phrase 'God-breathed' shows that God himself

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<sup>1</sup> The companion booklet *Drawing Closer to God* contains a detailed study of the grace of God in lesson 1.

inspired all the words of Scripture. He used different men at different times and places to write down what he wanted them to write, which is what makes the bible unique. **2 Peter 1:20-21** explains this clearly:

*Above all, 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.*

From the beginning of time, God the Creator spoke in words. See **Genesis 1:3**. God's first words to the people he had created are found in **Genesis 1:28-30**. He wanted to communicate with them because he loved them and desired a relationship with them. In **Genesis 2:16-18**, you can see how the Lord continued to speak with Adam and Eve.

Jesus is also described as the Word of God because the Lord spoke to the whole of his creation through him. Write the first sentence of **John 1:14**:

.....  
Jesus is the Living Word who came to live on earth to communicate God's love and concern for mankind. God has also provided us with his written word, which is what we call the bible. Turn to **Hebrews 4:12** and write down some of the qualities this verse mentions about the bible:  
.....

.....  
If we desire to know about God and understand his plans and purposes for our lives, we need to start with the bible. You do not have to be a Christian to gain many benefits from it. Here are some of the things you can do with the bible. On the left, tick any which you are already doing. On the right, write down what you feel is involved in each:

- Hear .....
- Journalise .....
- Memorise .....
- Study .....
- Read .....
- Meditate on .....
- Obey it .....

## 2. Prayer

Prayer simply means communicating with God. Anybody can talk to Jesus, whether they are a Christian or not. In fact, the bible assumes that people will

speak to him, especially at times of need. It also promises that he will respond! Fill in the missing words in the following verses:

**Psalm 34:17**     *The righteous cry out, and the LORD .....them*

**Psalm 55:17**     *Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he  
..... my voice.*

**Joel 2:32**         *And everyone who ..... on the name of the LORD  
will be saved;*

**1 John 5:14-15**   *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that  
if we ask anything according to his will, he .....  
us. And if we know that he .....us - whatever  
we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him.*

There is much which can be learned about prayer, but the most important thing is to make sure you get started. And when you speak to God, you do not have to be on your best behaviour, saying the things which you think he wants to hear. Just pour out your heart, telling the Lord about your feelings, the problems you are facing, and the help you need.

The word 'prayer' can include any, or all, of the following:

Appealing	Confessing	Petitioning
Asking	Desiring	Pleading
Calling for	Entreating	Requesting
Complaining	Hoping	Wishing

So do not restrict yourself! Just start talking to Jesus and begin to share your heart with him. He will listen to you and he will answer you.

## ***B. The course ahead***

All of the bible is full of God's wisdom as he inspired every page. But only the book of Acts describes how people became Christians. The first recorded occasion when people responded to the Gospel is in Acts 2. Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus instructed his followers to stay in Jerusalem and wait until they received the Holy Spirit. After the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples in the upper room, Peter began to preach to the crowd which had gathered. You can read the whole sermon starting from **Acts 2:14** if you like, but please read **Acts 2:32-37** and read what Peter declared about Jesus:

**Acts 2:32**         *God has raised this Jesus to life*

All the people present... *are witnesses of the fact.*

**Acts 2:33** Jesus has been... *exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus... has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*

**Acts 2:36** God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

As Peter made these bold declarations about Jesus, the people began to recognise that there was something more to Jesus than they had previously realised. They had begun to believe in Jesus. At the same time, they also began to feel guilty about their part in crucifying Jesus.

Read **Acts 2:37** and answer these questions:

How did the people feel when they heard what Peter said about Jesus?

.....

What question did they ask? .....

In **Acts 2:38**, 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 overall effect of his preaching is summarised in **Acts 2:41**: *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.* The people were immediately baptised and joined to the family of God.

To summarise what we have read in Acts 2, these first Christians took five basic steps. They:

1. had faith (or believed) in Jesus.
2. Repented
3. were baptised in water
4. received the Holy Spirit
5. joined the community of believers

The rest of the study looks at each of these steps in more detail.

<p><b>Assignment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Start reading the bible. If you do not have a bible, get hold of one as soon as possible.</li> <li>2. Start talking to the Lord Jesus in the ways mentioned above.</li> </ol>
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## 2. Believing in Jesus

Read **Acts 16:25-34**. Paul and Silas had been put in the stocks in jail because they were blamed for causing a riot in Philippi. They did not allow themselves to be discouraged by this setback but continued to praise God in jail late into the night. Then the Lord intervened and shook the whole place with an earthquake. The jailer assumed that all his prisoners would escape, so he decided to kill himself. But Paul cried out to him and assured him that they were all still there. The jailer was overawed by the events and asked a question in **Acts 16:30**. Write it out:

.....

Now write out Paul and Silas' reply in full (**Acts 16:31**):

.....

.....

Believing in Jesus was the key for salvation – both for the jailer and for each member of his family. Believing in Jesus means knowing that certain facts about him are true – and then acting on those facts.

### A. Some facts about Jesus

John finished his Gospel with the comment: *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.* (**John 21:25**). There is so much which could be said about Jesus, but we will look at some essential facts about him.

Read **1 Corinthians 15:1-8**. In this passage, Paul reminded the believers in Corinth of the basic Gospel message. He presented four facts:

#### 1. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (v3)

##### a) Christ died

John gives irrefutable evidence of his actual, physical death.

**John 19:33-34** *But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.*

This is recorded because some people have claimed that Jesus only swooned on the Cross and did not really die. The sudden flow of blood and water is medical evidence that Jesus was completely dead.

**b) ... for our sins**

The good news of Jesus is that he died to take away our sins. Read **Romans 5:8**. How did God demonstrate his love for us?

While we were still sinners .....

Read **1 Peter 2:24**. What did Jesus do as he died on the cross (or tree)?

.....

Read **1 Peter 3:18**. Who was righteous?

.....

Who are the unrighteous? .....

Why did Jesus die? .....

**Hebrews 7:26** tells us that Jesus is *holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens*. He is the only perfect, sinless person who has ever lived - the only person who could die in our place as a substitute to take our punishment and bear the penalty of our sins.

**2. Christ was buried (v4)**

Paul wanted to underline the fact that Jesus had physically died.

**John 19:40-42** *Taking Jesus' body, the two of them (Joseph and Nicodemus) wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

**3. Christ was raised on the third day (v4)**

This truth about Jesus makes him unique, and was something his early followers constantly preached about. Complete the following verses:

**Acts 2:24** *But God ..... dead,*

**Acts 3:15** *You killed the author of life, but God.....  
..... We are witnesses of this.*

**Acts 4:33** *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the  
..... Jesus,...*

**Acts 13:30** *But God .....*

**Acts 17:18** *They said this because Paul was preaching the good*



news about .....

**Romans 1:4** ....through the Spirit of holiness (he) was declared with power to be the Son of God by his .....  
.....: *Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The fact of the resurrection is the convincing proof that Jesus had really died for the sins of the world and that God had accepted his sacrifice.

**4. Christ appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve... to more than five hundred of the brothers...to James, then to all the apostles and last of all... to me (vv5-8)**

Paul emphasized that the risen Christ appeared to so many people so as to prove that what he said was factual; it is historically true. In a court of law, two or three witnesses were sufficient to prove something was true. (**2 Corinthians 13:1** and **1 Timothy 5:19**) Paul referred to hundreds of witnesses so that nobody would doubt the truth of the resurrection.

In **1 Corinthians 15:1**, Paul said they had done two things when he first preached the Gospel to them. What had they done with his message?

- 1. ....
- 2. ....

The bible teaches many other facts about Jesus. Some of these are mentioned on page 6, quoting what Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. Other truths about Jesus are found in **Hebrews 1:2-3**. Write down at least six things which these verses say about Jesus:

- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....
- 4. ....
- 5. ....
- 6. ....

We need to come to a place where we believe these facts about Jesus, but we should not forget that God is at work in enabling us to believe. **Ephesians 2:8** makes this clear: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.* The grace of God works behind the scenes to help us see the truth about Jesus and then to receive the gift of faith to believe in him.

## B. Acting on the facts

In **1 Corinthians 15:2**, Paul also urged the Corinthians to *hold firmly to the word....* If they did not do this, they had *believed in vain*. Knowing facts about Jesus is not sufficient. We need to base our lives on the facts.

The story is told about a man called Blondin who used to earn his living by walking across the Niagara Falls on a tight rope. He would charge each person \$1 to watch this spectacle.

After he had walked on the tight rope to the other side, he would walk back and then ask the crowd, ‘How many of you believe that I could walk across with a wheel barrow?’ The crowd would cheer and say ‘Yes!’ So Blondin would take his wheel barrow, with the single wheel on the rope and his hands on the two handles, and walk across and back.

Then he would ask, ‘How many of you believe that I could walk across with a wheel barrow – with a person in it?’ Once again, the people would cheer and cry out ‘Yes!’ Then he would ask the challenging question, ‘Which of you would like to get into the wheel barrow?’

That is the crunch. It is easy to believe that Blondin can walk across the Niagara Falls with a person in his wheel barrow, but it requires real faith to entrust your own life into his hands and get into his wheelbarrow.

God does not want us to only believe the facts about Jesus. He wants us to get into Jesus’ wheel barrow – trusting him for every detail of our lives. When we believe in Jesus, we believe he is:

**Our Saviour**      the one who died for our sins

**Our Lord**        the one who is in charge of all things, who knows what is best for us and who should be obeyed completely.

Have you believed in Jesus in this way? It is your choice, but is something which God longs for you to do. As Paul told the Ephesian elders in **Acts 20:21**: *‘I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.’*

### Assignment

1. Review the statements about Jesus which have been quoted in this study. Meditate on who Jesus is and what he has done for you through his death.
2. Consider Paul’s appeal to turn to God and have faith in Jesus and decide what you want to do about it.

### 3. Repenting

In **Acts 20:21**, we saw that repentance and faith are essential foundations for the Christian life. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, the people began to believe some of the truths about Jesus which we saw in Lesson 2. At the same time they also began to feel guilty and realised that they had done wrong. When the crowd asked Peter what they should do, he answered *‘Repent and be baptised!’* (See **Acts 2:38**)

Today, some people think they are Christians because:

- ❖ their parents are Christian
- ❖ they’ve been baptised or confirmed
- ❖ they believe in God
- ❖ their Government card says they are Christian
- ❖ they were born Christians
- ❖ they live in a “Christian” country
- ❖ they live in a Christian home
- ❖ they’ve been touched by the Holy Spirit
- ❖ they do good things
- ❖ they go to church

None of these makes a person a Christian. To become a Christian, you have to believe in Jesus and repent, as the New Testament shows. The word ‘repent’ literally means to change one’s mind – particularly regarding the way we think about sin and evil. The reality is that most people do not hate their sin, and many do not really want to change. But **Acts 17:30** clearly explains, *‘In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.’*

So we are commanded by God to change our minds about sin, to begin to hate it the way he does and to turn away from it. Repentance is essential to becoming a born again Christian.

#### A. Why do I need to repent?

You may not like to admit this, but the bible is clear that all of us have a problem with sin. God never sins, and we have seen that Jesus never sinned, but each of us has sinned.

Read **Romans 3:23** Who has sinned?

.....

The effect of sin is that we are cut off from God and are unable to relate with him in the way that he intends and desires. Turn to **Isaiah 59:2** and write down the effect of sin on us (iniquities is another word for sin).

.....

Check list - have I sinned?

The following list includes behaviour which the bible regards as sin. It does not cover every sin but it indicates a number of different areas. Read the list and then tick any ones which you have done - even once:

- Anger                       Fortunetelling             Jealousy                     Stealing
- Bitterness                 Hate                         Lying                         Swearing
- Bribery                     Idolatry                    Pride                         Unforgiveness
- Dirty thoughts         Ignoring God             Selfishness               Witchcraft
- Drunkenness             Immoral acts             Spite

For your own eyes only, how many ticks have you scored?

.....

Even one tick means that we are separated from God, so that:

1. we live this life without God and without his help and guidance.
2. we are slaves of this world and of Satan.
3. we will die without God and be lost forever.

Read **Romans 6:23**. What are the wages of sin?

.....

What is the free gift of God? .....

As we have seen in Lesson 2, Christ died for our sins. This was the reason God sent him to this earth. (See **John 3:16**). God loves us so much that he does not want anyone to perish and go to hell. He longs for everyone to enjoy his free gift of eternal life.

**B. How do I repent?**

Repenting includes the following steps:

**1. Conviction of past sins**

I need to acknowledge in my mind that I have sinned and have done things which God hates. **Colossians 1:21** shows the condition I was in when I was not a Christian. Please fill in the blanks:

*We were ..... from God and were enemies .....  
..... behaviour.*

I need to be convinced in my mind that I am a sinner.

## 2. Confession of past sin

When I realise I have sinned in any area, I need to speak to God about it. I will not remember every detail but I should be as specific as possible in saying what I have done wrong. Read **1 John 1:9** and fill in the blanks: *If we*

..... *our sins, he is faithful and just and will* .....  
*us our sins and* ..... *us from all unrighteousness.*

The main person I have sinned against is God himself. David expressed this in **Psalm 51:4**: *‘Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.’* My confession should first and foremost be to the Lord. However, I will probably have sinned against people. Where possible, I should also endeavour to confess my sins to the people who have been hurt by my sinful behaviour and whom I have sinned against.

## 3. Correction of past sin

Often there is nothing I can do to make up for the things I have done wrong in the past. However, there are occasions when I can do something to try and make amends. **Luke 19:1-10** gives an example of this. After Zaccheus had welcomed Jesus into his home, he offered to do two things (v8) Write them down here:

.....  
.....

Jesus responded to Zacchaeus’ desire to try to correct his past sins by declaring, *‘Today salvation has come to this house...’* (**Luke 19:9**)

## 4. Conversion from past sin - the heart

True repentance must also include renouncing sin and turning away from evil. John 8 records the moving story of the woman caught in adultery. Although she had sinned, Jesus had mercy on her and refused to condemn her. But in v11, Jesus gave a final instruction to the woman. Write it out:

*‘Go now and* .....

The proof that I have really repented is that I actually stop sinning. I may slip into sin again after I have surrendered my life to Jesus, but my intention should be that I never want to commit sin again. In **Acts 26:20**, Paul explained, *‘I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.’* My life should be different!

Think for a few minutes with the Lord. Ask him to show you some areas where you know you have really repented. Then, write them down here:

.....

One further aspect of the good news is that God not only forgives our sin but gives us power to overcome it. As **Titus 2:11-12** explains: *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.* Ask the Lord for his grace so that you will resist temptation and not fall into sin.

### C. Making it definite

If you are not already a Christian, you could pray to God, using the bible truths we have looked, at and become one today.

You become a Christian when you repent, believe and decide to obey Jesus as your Lord. God wants you to do other things to show you mean business with him:

- ❖ begin talking to Jesus daily - develop your relationship with him
- ❖ tell other people that you are now a disciple of Jesus
- ❖ get baptised – this shows that you believe in Jesus and want to obey him.
- ❖ join a local group of born again Christians
- ❖ pray and read the Bible - make both a daily habit
- ❖ call to the Lord Jesus and ask him to fill you with the Holy Spirit
- ❖ continue with this course

For your benefit and record, you could sign below:

I, ..... became a disciple of Jesus  
on...../...../..... Signed: .....

This decision is the beginning of your life as a disciple of Jesus. The remainder of this course is part of God’s discipling process to help you get firmly established in your life as a Christian.

<p><b>Assignment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review this study to make sure you have understood your own sinfulness and God’s amazing offer of forgiveness of all your sins through Jesus. Praise God for sending Jesus!</li> <li>2. Review what it means to be repentant. Bring one or two specific issues before the Lord and ask him to help you live differently.</li> </ol>
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# 4. Water baptism

In the early church, a person was baptised shortly after he or she decided to follow Jesus. It was a definite, public act showing that a person had believed in Jesus, repented and wanted to be his disciple. The bible never mentions the 'baptism' of babies – only the baptism of believers.

## A. Jesus was baptised

Read **Matthew 3:13-17**. Jesus expected John the Baptist to baptise him, but John did not want to. Why do you think John responded in this way?

.....  
.....

In your opinion, was John's reaction: reasonable [ ] or unreasonable [ ]?

Jesus' reply to John (v15) was, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all .....'. Write down what you think this means

.....  
.....

What three things happened as soon as Jesus was baptised?

- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....

Why do you think God spoke?

.....  
.....

How do you think Jesus felt when he heard the voice of his Father?

.....  
.....

## B. A command from Jesus

Read **Matthew 28:19-20**. Before Jesus returned to his Father, he instructed his disciples to do four things. What are they?

- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....
- 4. ....

### ***C. The command carried out***

The book of Acts has various accounts of people being baptised: Read **Acts 2:37-41**. How many people believed and were baptised?

.....

Read **Acts 8:26-40**. This is an amazing story of God's guidance and timing. The angel of the Lord directed Philip so that he joined the eunuch just as he was reading from Isaiah 53. How soon after hearing the good news and believing was the eunuch baptised?

.....

Which words in verses 38-39 suggest that the water was deep?

.....

The word 'baptism' is from a Greek word meaning to dip, submerge, or cleanse by washing. The word was used for the dyeing of cloth which required immersion. Christian baptism was by total immersion for those who believed, and there was no long training before baptism.

Read **Acts 16:29-34**. How soon after hearing about Jesus were the Philippian jailer and his family baptised?

.....

Is this incident a case for infant baptism? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Write down your reasons for answering in this way:

.....

.....

### ***D. The meaning of baptism***

**Acts 22:16** records that baptism is a simple picture of the washing away of sins. But it does more than this. Read **Romans 6:1-12**.

Who are we baptised into?.....v3

What are we baptised into?.....v3

We are not baptised into a particular church or organisation. It is an outward act declaring that I have become a Christian and now belong to God. Baptism unites us with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection.

Which part of us has been crucified? (v6) .....

Why does it need to die? (v7).....

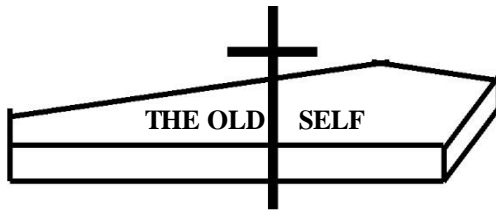


In baptism I declare that my old life is dead. The power of sin in my life has been broken and I am now free to live a life which pleases God.

**Romans 6:10** tells us two facts about Jesus:

- 1. ....
- 2. ....

Now, fill in the blanks in **Romans 6:11**, *In the ..... way, count yourselves dead to....., and alive to.....*



Write down two areas of sin where you have already found freedom:

- 1. ....
- 2. ....

Write down one area of sin where you still want to find freedom:

.....

Today ask God to help you in this area of sin, as you count yourself dead to it.

Now, write down four things you can do, because you are alive to God.

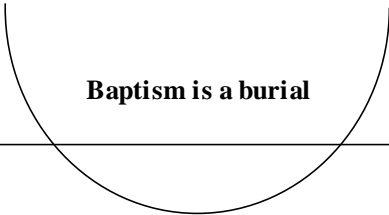
- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....
- 4. ....

Praise and thank God for each of them.

When your old self tries to get out of the grave, remind him that he is dead; he went to the cross with Jesus. You are now living a new life in the power of the resurrection of Jesus. **Romans 6:4** says: ..just as Christ was raised from the dead,... we too may .....

Our new life starts when we repent and believe in Jesus. Baptism is the burial of our old life.

**Dead to old self**



**Raised to new life**

**Repentance**

**BURIED**

**Faith**

If you wish to be baptised, talk to one of your church leaders or a person who has been a Christian for some years. He will ask about your repentance and faith in Christ, to make sure that you are sincere and understand the importance of the step you are taking.

You will be invited to be baptised - which may be in a river, lake, sea, swimming pool, baptistry or even a tub! Bring some spare clothes, and be ready to give an account of your faith before you are baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by brief total immersion. Encourage your family and friends to come and witness this joyous occasion.

Baptism declares to the forces of darkness that you now belong to Jesus. Don't be surprised if your decision to be baptised is opposed - but stand up to it! God delights in your obedience. Do you remember how God felt when Jesus was baptised? He feels the same about you. Expect him to meet with you through the power of the Holy Spirit when you are baptised.

**Assignment**

1. Ponder the glorious truths of **Colossians 2:12-14**. Ask the Lord to give you a revelation of all that happens through baptism.
2. If you have not been baptized in water as a believer, reflect on this study and ask the Lord to show you what he wants you to do.
3. If you have already been baptized, allow the Holy Spirit to show you further areas of your life which have to be put to death.

## 5. Receiving the Holy Spirit

The Bible teaches that God consists of three persons. Read **Matthew 28:19-20**. Jesus commanded that people be baptised in the name of:

.....

These three are known as the Trinity and they work together as one God. Read **Matthew 3:13-17**. Who descended like a dove?

.....

The Holy Spirit is a person who has all the attributes of God. He has been working in you to bring you to a place where you could believe in Jesus. When we were unbelievers, our condition was desperate. Read **2 Corinthians 4:4** and summarise our condition then:

.....

Now read **2 Corinthian 4:6** and fill in the blanks:

*For God... made ..... shine in ..... to give us the light of the ..... of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

It was the work of the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see Jesus. God's plan is that the Holy Spirit should increasingly work in us so that we have divine power to live the Christian life.

### A. The promise of the Holy Spirit

At the last supper with his disciples, Jesus spoke about many things, but he taught a lot about the Holy Spirit whom he was going to send to them.

What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do?

**John 14:26** .....

**John 15:26** .....

**John 16:7-8** .....

**John 16:13** .....

.....(prophecy)

**John 16:14** .....

Read the following verses in Romans 8 and write down what each of them teaches about the Holy Spirit:

- verse 6 .....
- verse 11 .....
- verse 16 .....
- verse 26 .....

**B. The baptism in the Holy Spirit**

Read **Acts 1:3-9**. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised his disciples that they would be baptised in the Holy Spirit (v5) The Greek word means ‘immersed’ or ‘soaked’. What did Jesus say would happen when the Holy Spirit baptised them? (v8):

.....

What was this power for? .....

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is an entry into the power of God. Read **Acts 2:1-20**. How did the coming of the Holy Spirit show?

.....

What did the disciples do when they were filled with the Holy Spirit?

verse 4 .....

verse 11 .....

What else can we expect when people are filled with the Holy Spirit?

verse 17 .....

What was the result of Peter’s preaching after he had been baptised in the Holy Spirit?

Verse 41 .....

They had obviously received power! Other people in Acts were baptised in the Holy Spirit. Were hands laid on them? Did they speak in tongues? Write Yes, No, or ? if you do not know:

Acts	Who	Hands	Tongues
<b>2:4</b>			
<b>8:14-18</b>			
<b>9:17-18</b>			
<b>10:44-48</b>			
<b>19:1-7</b>			

In Acts 8, people who had earlier believed in the Lord Jesus were baptised in the Holy Spirit when Peter and John laid hands on them. For various reasons, some people are not baptised in the Holy Spirit when they accept Jesus as Lord, but they should ask God to fill them with his Spirit as soon as they realise the importance of this baptism. Every Christian should be baptised in the Holy Spirit in an obvious way.

### C. The gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit continues the work of Jesus on earth by giving people power and special gifts. These gifts make the church strong and effective for God. Write down the spiritual gifts listed in **1 Corinthians 12:7-11**:

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 1. .... | 6. .... |
| 2. .... | 7. .... |
| 3. .... | 8. .... |
| 4. .... | 9. .... |
| 5. .... |         |

The eighth gift mentioned is speaking in different kinds of tongues. We have already seen that many people in the book of Acts spoke in tongues when they were baptised in the Holy Spirit. It is an important gift.

**1 Corinthians 14:2**      *anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God... he utters mysteries with his spirit.*

**1 Corinthians 14:4**      He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself (that is he builds himself up, makes himself strong)

**1 Corinthians 14:5**      Paul expressed his desire: *I would like every one of you to speak in tongues...*

God’s desire is that we all speak in tongues so that we can talk to him about things we do not even understand, and so that we can be strengthened in our spirits.

Now, write down the seven gifts listed in **Romans 12:6-8**.

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 1. .... | 5. .... |
| 2. .... | 6. .... |
| 3. .... | 7. .... |
| 4. .... |         |

Both these lists include the *gift of prophesying or prophecy*. This gift enables a person to speak the words and thoughts of God and is vital to the life of God's people. Write out **1 Corinthians 14:1** in full:

.....  
.....

The reason prophecy is so desirable for the life of the people of God is explained in **1 Corinthians 14:3**: *But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.* **1 Corinthians 14:4** adds: *he who prophesies edifies the church.*

**D. What about you?**

Which gifts do you think you already have?

.....

Which gifts would you like to have?

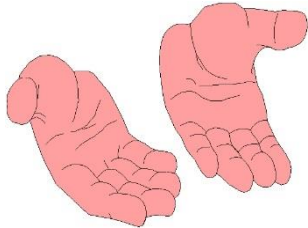
.....

Read **Matthew 7:11**. Whom does God give gifts to?

.....

Read **John 7:37-39**. What must you do if you are thirsty?

.....



If you have not received the Holy Spirit, do not wait any longer! Ask God to baptise you with the Holy Spirit and start to praise him. Ask other Christians who already speak in tongues to lay hands on you. Ask God for the gifts you desire. Expect great things!

<p><b>Assignment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Make sure that you use the Spiritual gifts you have already received on a regular basis.</li><li>2. Keep on asking the Lord for the gifts you desire.</li></ol>
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## 6. Joining with other believers

When a natural baby is born, it has to leave the mother’s womb, travel down the birth canal, emerge into open air, breathe its first breath, and have its umbilical cord cut. All of these steps are essential to give birth to a healthy baby. Nobody stops to ask if the baby is ‘born’ or ‘not born’ along the process. They just want to see each stage completed and a healthy baby born into the world.

In the same way, becoming a Christian involves all the steps we have seen already - believing in Jesus, repenting of sin, being baptised in water and receiving the Holy Spirit. Each part is vital to getting the right start to the Christian life.



### A. *The people of God*

The final step in ‘starting well’ as a Christian is being joined to other members of God’s family. At the conclusion of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost, **Acts 2:41** says that: *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

The bible calls this family of believers the ‘church’. For some, ‘church’ is an old grey building; for others it is a sombre Sunday morning assembly. Still others see the church as a slick organisation promoting its message in enticing ways. The Greek word for church is ‘ekklesia’ – which means ‘called out ones’. Read **1 Peter 2:9** and fill in the blanks:

*But you are a chosen ....., a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a ..... belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who ..... you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

The church is not a building or an organisation but people – those who have been called by God from darkness and who have been born again by the Holy Spirit. In **Matthew 16:15-18**, Jesus talks of building his worldwide church, made up of all born again people who know him as the Son of the living God. In **Matthew 18:15-17**, Jesus refers to the church as a small group of believers who are listening to a report on a brother’s sin.

We each should have a personal relationship with Jesus, but he also wants us to learn to love other members of his family and work together with them. God is relational and he always works in a ‘team’ with the Son and the Holy Spirit. He

desires that his born again children also learn to relate well with each other. Read **John 13:34-35** and fill in the blanks:

*A new command I give you: ..... As I have loved you, so you must ..... By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you .....*

We should rejoice that we are part of a worldwide body of believers, but what really counts in the Christian life is joining together with a small number of brothers and sisters and learning to love them.

**B. Learning to love**

Complete the rest of **1 John 3:1**. How great .....

.....  
We belong to a wonderful family. God is our loving Father and has showered so much love on his children! But the Lord wants us to start showing his kind of love to others. Read **1 John 3:16** and fill in the blanks: *This is how we know what*

*..... is Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our ..... for our .....*

That is the standard of love that God wants - sacrificing our own interests and desires so that we can serve others. It does not come naturally but through the working of the Holy Spirit within us. See **Romans 5:5**.

Now turn to **1 John 4:20**. *If anyone says 'I love God', yet hates his brother, he is a .....* These are strong words.

Our professed love for God is proved by how much we love our 'brothers' - and they include all sorts of people, some you would never have chosen as your friends! But God has chosen them to be a part of the church, to be our 'brothers' and often to be his instruments in shaping us.

It is God's love which holds his people together - a love which must be expressed. Now read **1 John 3:18** and complete the verse: *Let us not*

*..... with words or tongue, but with ..... and in truth.*

We have to do it! We can express love by practical acts of kindness such as hospitality, visiting, doing odd jobs, etc. and by encouraging others through spiritual gifts. Most importantly, we express love by being a family. Jesus knew that there would sometimes be problems between family members, so he taught us how to keep on loving one another.



### 1. Don't be critical - Matthew 7:1-5.

We need to learn to love those we do not naturally like, people who irritate us and 'get on our nerves'. It helps to remember:

- ❖ how patient God is with our faults
- ❖ that others have to put up with our faults too
- ❖ that by nature, we see other peoples' faults as very big and think ours are very small by comparison.
- ❖ that God will judge us at the same standard as we use to judge others. So don't look for specks!

### 2. Don't gossip - Matthew 12:33-37.

Our words are important to God - and his people. Use them to encourage and build up one another, rather than to pull down and divide the church. Even if you have been hurt, decide not to gossip about it. If necessary, talk to somebody who has been a Christian longer than you and whom you can trust to keep the matter to themselves. Pray like David in **Psalm 141:3**

*'Set a guard over my ....., O Lord.*

*Keep watch over the door of my .....*'

### 3. Confess your sins - Matthew 5:23-24.

God says that our relationship with our brother is more important than our religious duty. Go and be reconciled. Don't say, 'It's mostly his fault!' Simply confess your part and leave the rest with God.

We have already seen that all sin is primarily against God (**Psalm 51:4**.) We should confess each sin to him knowing that the Lord will graciously forgive all our sins (**1 John 1:9**) When God forgives our sins, it means:

- ❖ we owe him nothing; Jesus paid in full.      **Isaiah 53:6**
- ❖ he removes our sins far away from us.      **Psalm 103:12**
- ❖ he remembers our sins no more.              **Isaiah 43:25**

This is the family standard of forgiveness. Fill in the blanks in **Ephesians 4:32**.

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, ..... each other, just as in Christ, God.....you.*

### 4. Forgive your brother - Mark 11:25.

**Mark 11:25:** *..... if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

- ❖ Don't wait until you are asked - you may not be. Decide now to forgive him or her – unilaterally, just on your own.
- ❖ It covers anything and anyone - big or small, whatever you have held against a person.
- ❖ We have to forgive to receive God's ongoing forgiveness. See **Matthew 6:14-15** and **Matthew 18:21-35**.

Review your life. Tick any people you have not forgiven, whom you resent, or who have wronged you:

- Parents                       Relatives                       Spouse                       Landlord
- Children                       Boss                       Employee                       Tenant
- Other people who have let you down or offended you

Pray for any you have marked. Ask God to give you his love for them, knowing that God loves and cares for them.

Forgive them as God has forgiven you. Ask God to help you make the decision to forgive, and to stand in it.

### 5. Confront sin - Matthew 18:15.

There will be times when your brother or sister sins against you, and even though you have forgiven them, you feel the need to talk about it.

Who should you talk to about the sin? .....

Who should you not talk to? .....

This command is hard to follow as we sometimes long to talk to somebody else, but gossip will never win our brother. If you feel unable to talk to the person who has sinned, pray for them and make sure that you have really forgiven them from your heart.

### 6. Serve - Galatians 5:13

Jesus summed up his life by saying that he *....did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* (**Mark 10:45**) **Galatians 5:13** instructs us to *serve one another in love*. Serving is a vital way of expressing love to our brothers and sisters in Christ. To help you think about how you could serve the believers God is joining you to, list some of the ways in which you have seen other people serve:

Activity	Mark	Activity	Mark
1.		6.	
2.		7.	
3.		8.	
4.		9.	
5.		10.	

Against each activity you have written down, put an

- A. for those activities where you have already served.
- B. for each activity for which you have previously offered to help.
- C. for any activity which you feel you should offer to serve

**7. Persevere - Hebrews 10:25**

**Hebrews 10:25** gives us a simple instruction in terms of relating with the brothers and sisters he joins us to. Look it up and fill in the blanks:

*Let us not give up ....., as some are in the habit of doing, but let us ..... - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Whether the Lord joins you to a church of thousands or to a small house church, he wants us to persevere in loving those whom he joins you to.

**8. Be strong in grace - 2 Timothy 2:1**

This study began by talking about the love and grace of God (see page 3). We have now seen many things that we should do to co-operate with God so that we run a good race, but we must never forget that it is God’s grace which will motivate and sustain us. His love and power are available to us for every step of the race. That is why the apostle Paul urged his spiritual son in **2 Timothy 2:1**: You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. As a final word to sons and daughters of God, we repeat his encouragement: **Be strong in the grace of God! Run well!**

**Assignment**

1. Review this entire study and look at each step to starting well. You need to know these for yourself and also to explain to others.
2. You may already know which group of believers God has joined you to. If so, be committed to them. If not, ask the Lord to show you which part of his family he wants you to belong to.

