

ONLINE 1 KNOWING WHERE YOU STAND WITH GOD

What do you think makes someone a Christian?

To build strong relationships you need confidence about where you stand with the other person. When it comes to God, many Christians are unsure about their relationship with him or whether they'll be with him forever.

On a scale of 1-10 (where 10 = certain), how sure are you that you are right with God and that you'll be with him forever?

On what do you base your confidence?

In 1 John 5, John says *"I write these things to you...so that you may know you have eternal life."* God wants us to be sure of our relationship with Him. Being clear about this is vital to build trust and friendship with him.

JOHN 1 v 12-13

12 To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

1 JOHN 5 v 9-12

9 We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 10 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

What does it mean to receive and believe in Jesus?

What are the promises in these verses?

How did you receive Jesus?

Why is God's testimony greater than man's testimony?

Do you find it easy to believe God's promises in the Bible?

What are our two choices in v10?

What is the evidence that we have truly believed according to v10?

'To believe' here is not just giving assent to an idea e.g. "I trust your driving", but placing the weight of our lives on that truth e.g. Letting me drive you around town.

Where is eternal life to be found?

What are the two groups of people in v12?

Do you have the Son and how do you know?

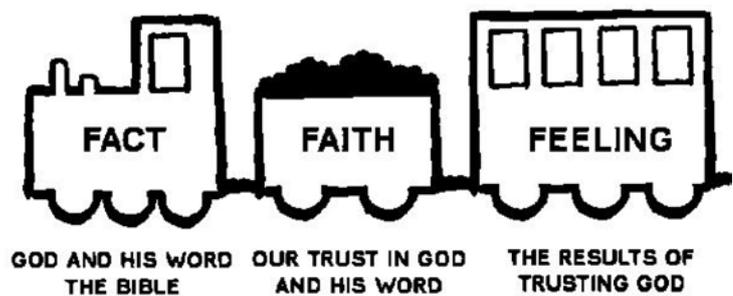
If you're unclear consider JOHN 1v12-13 and REVELATION 3v20.

If we've met the conditions and trust God's promises in the Bible, then this gives us a secure foundation to build on.

But how do our feelings fit in to this?

What happens when I don't feel like these things are true?

Christians live by faith, trusting God and what he has said in his Word. Feelings are valid and important, but they don't determine what's true. As we put our confidence in what God says, our feelings will catch up. It's as we trust God in a specific area, e.g. that he's forgiven a particular sin, that we are able to experience him in that area.



Faith leads us to true experience. Just as the steam train, fuelled from the coal truck, pulls the carriage, so our Christian life is driven by God's promises in the Bible fuelled by our trust, which our feelings then follow. A Christian doesn't need to be pushed around by fleeting feelings.

1 JOHN 5 v 13-15

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

What are the conditions to the promise in v13?
Where do you stand in light of v13?

John doesn't say that we will get eternal life, but that we already have it. What are the implications of this for you?

What are the two promises and two conditions in v14-15?

How would you put v14-15 in your own words?

How do they help us understand what we've considered in the previous verses?

How does this principle help us with God's promise in John 1v12-13, which we looked at

Ultimately, there are 3 things that give us confidence in our relationship with God:

1. Our trust in the authority of God's Word and the promises he makes to us.
2. The Holy Spirit in our hearts assuring us that we're God's children (ROM 8v15-17).
3. Over time we see evidence of change in our lives (GALATIANS 5v22-23).

Can you relate to this experience of a deep inner knowing that God is your father?
How has your life changed since you chose to follow Jesus?

As we spend time with God and get to know him more, our ability to trust that he loves us and cares about us grows. As our love and trust increase, so we become more and more like Jesus.

What else does God promise us in the following verses?

ROMANS 8 v 38-39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

COLOSSIANS 1 v 13-14

He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1 PETER 1 v 3-4

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.

JOHN 10 v 28-30

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's

In summary, how are we able to “know” that we have eternal life?

At the start we were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 our confidence that we were right with God.

Has this answer changed at all in light of what we've studied?

ONLINE 2

FORGIVEN AND FREE: GETTING RID OF GUILT

We all make mistakes in our friendships. We need to face our mistakes and put things right to keep our relationships healthy. If we want to enjoy God's friendship all day, every day, we need to know how to sort things out when they go wrong.

Close your eyes, and imagine you're looking at God.

How do you think he feels about you right now?

When you become aware that you've done something wrong, how do you deal with it?

1 PETER 3 v 18

Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

Did Jesus' death cover sins

(i) before the cross?

(ii) from the cross until today?

(iii) from today until he returns?

If Jesus has already forgiven our sins past, present and future, why do we still need to confess them?

When we receive Jesus into our life we become a child of God. This is a permanent, secure relationship. God doesn't stop being our father, but sin messes up our daily friendship with him.

OUR RELATIONSHIP AS GOD'S CHILDREN

Established once for all

Permanent reality

We can't mess it up

OUR DAILY FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Needs to be maintained

Moment by moment

Blocked when we sin

The effects of sin and guilt are extremely destructive in the Christian life. They undermine our ability to enjoy God's love and to trust him, and we turn back to our own efforts and resources. Through Jesus, God has provided a way to set us free from both sin and guilt, so we can enjoy his love and forgiveness continually. In the next section we'll look at how to put things right when we mess up.

JOHN 3 v 19-20

Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed

1 JOHN 1 v 5-10

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

How is John using the metaphor of light and darkness here?

What does light do?

Why do we hide from the light?

What does it mean to walk in darkness?

How does this affect our fellowship with God?

What does it mean to walk in the light?

How is this related to our fellowship with one another?

How often do you need to confess your sins to God?

How can we be sure we're forgiven?

What is John saying about God in v5?

What does God promise in v7?

How does "walking in darkness" affect our relationship with ourselves? What are the implications?

What is God's promise in v9? What is the condition?

Without showing others, ask God now to make you aware of anything wrong between you and him, and write down the specific things he shows you. The devil tries to make us guilty with general accusations (e.g. you're selfish) and we need to reject what he says. When the Spirit convicts us of sin he's always specific (e.g. in this specific situation you had a selfish attitude), so confession needs to be specific. Give him time to show you everything in your life that's not right with him. It's important to agree with God's way of seeing us. Confession means agreeing with what God says:

- Agreeing with him when he tells us what we have done wrong.
- Agreeing with him that what Jesus did on the cross was enough to pay for our sin completely.
- Trusting that God will continue to help us change and become more like him as we turn away from our sin.

When you've finished your list, write 1 JOHN 1v9 all over it. Thank God for his forgiveness and destroy the list. You may also need to put things right with another person if you've wronged them. After you've confessed your sins, remember that any guilt you still feel comes from the devil so feel free to reject it. (PSALM 103v12, PSALM 32v5).

Confession is about experiencing friendship with God because of the forgiveness that was paid for 2,000 years ago on the cross. It is already yours. It is not our act of confession that makes us clean, but what Jesus did for us. By confessing our sin as soon as we become aware of it we can experience God's love and forgiveness continually.

ONLINE 3

EXPERIENCING GOD'S POWER: FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

What words would you use to describe your experience of the Christian life this week?

Living the Christian life in our own strength is impossible. Jesus says in JOHN 15v5: *“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.”* The only way to live the Christian life is for Jesus to dwell in us, living his life through our life by the Holy Spirit. As we submit ourselves to the Spirit, he shows us how to live us through the Bible and his prompting and gives us power to obey him. Jesus introduced the Spirit in JOHN 14v16-18:

JOHN 14 v 16-18

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

From these verses we learn much about the Spirit:

1. The Spirit is not a force, but a personal being.
2. The original Greek for ‘another counsellor’ literally means ‘another counsellor of exactly the same kind’. In other words, the Spirit perfectly represents Jesus.
3. It is by the Holy Spirit coming and living in us that Jesus is with us.

What do you understand to be the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

I CORINTHIANS 2v14 onwards describes 3 types of people: the person without the Spirit (a non-Christian), the spiritual person (a person directed and empowered by the Spirit) and the worldly or fleshly person (a Christian who is not obeying God’s word or depending on his Spirit): *“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God... The spiritual man makes judgments about all things... Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly, mere infants in Christ.”*



The circles represent our life, the thrones who we’re living for. All Christians have the Spirit in their life but not all believers are filled with the Spirit. The critical question is not how much we have of God but how much God has of us. When we sin, we take control of our life and run it to our own ends

To be filled with the Spirit is to keep Christ on the throne of our life. We do this by surrendering ourselves to him, obeying him and trusting him to empower our obedience.

Which circle best describes you?

Which circle would you like to describe you?

Jesus explains how he lives his life through us in JOHN 15v4-12:

JOHN 15 v 4-12

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "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. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. 9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 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. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

v 4-6

What does Jesus mean by "remain in me"?

What are the implications of remaining or not remaining in him?

What does it mean to bear fruit? What promise does Jesus give?

What is his warning?

What does this mean in light of our assurance of salvation?

v 7-8

What do we learn about prayer?

What does it mean for his words to remain in us?

Why is it good to ask God for things?

v 9-12

What do we learn about Jesus' love for us?

How do we remain in his love?

What is Jesus' command?

Christ lives in us by his Spirit. Jesus promises the Spirit to all who really want him:

LUKE 11 v 9-13

9 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. 10 For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened. 11 Which of you fathers, if your son asks for fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if asks for an egg would give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

What promises does Jesus give in this passage?

What are the conditions?

What is he seeking to emphasise by talking about asking, seeking and knocking?

Jesus is keen to emphasise that the Holy Spirit is a good gift. Why is this so important?

How do you feel about being filled with the Spirit?



We know that it's God's will for us to be filled with the Spirit. In EPHESIANS 5v18 we are commanded to be continually filled with the Spirit. In LUKE 11v9-13 we saw that God promises to fill us if we ask him to. Consider the following questions:

Do I want to wholeheartedly give myself to God?

Am I willing to turn away from sin?

Do I really want to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit?

Do I trust God to fill me when I ask him to according to his promise in the Bible?

If you can answer yes to the above, ask God to fill you now and he will. When we've asked God to fill us with the Spirit, our confidence that he has filled us does not come from any experiences we may have, but from our trust in his promise to fill us when we ask.

We can achieve nothing apart from the Spirit. However, when he fills us, it doesn't mean that we need do nothing more and become passive. It's as we obey God, trusting in his Spirit, that he empowers our efforts. The Spirit lives through us, not for us. Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-off action, but an ongoing lifestyle of surrendering ourselves to God and trusting him to empower us as we obey Jesus.



ONLINE 4

LINING UP OUR LIVES TO GOD: WALK THIS WAY

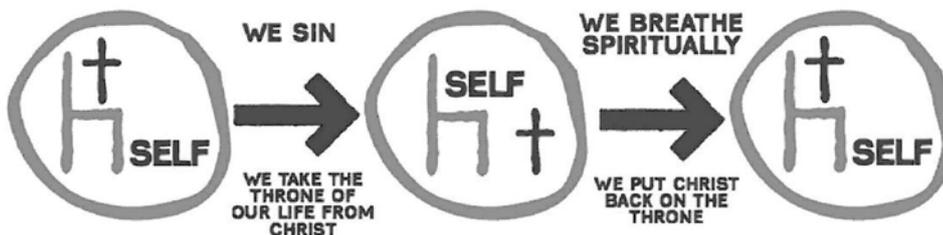


Since the last study, have you asked the Holy Spirit to fill you? How's it going?
What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?

The Spirit-filled life is not a one-off event but a way of life. Christ wants to live his life through our life moment by moment. Ephesians 5v18 can be translated literally as "go on continually being filled with the Spirit". To do this we need to keep Christ on the throne of our lives by surrendering ourselves to him, obeying him and trusting him to empower our obedience moment by moment. A simple analogy with breathing helps us see how we can live in God's power as a way of life:

EXHALE - We breathe out by dealing with our sin as soon as we become aware of it.

INHALE - We breathe in the Holy Spirit by surrendering our life to Christ, trusting the Spirit to fill us with his presence and power. This can be shown as follows:



To be a disciple of Jesus means to follow him and to learn from him how to live our every day life as he would if he were us. This isn't easy, because the Bible pictures the Earth as a war zone and we face opposition. We must learn to apply our faith to our daily circumstances and relationships.

What's been your experience of trying to live the Christian life?
What struggles have you faced?

The Bible describes three main enemies to living the Christian life:
our old nature (the flesh or sinful nature), the world (the culture and people around us), and the devil.

What do we learn about our opponents from the following?



THE FLESH

ROMANS 7v15-18

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

THE WORLD

I JOHN 12v15-17

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, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he does – 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 for ever.

THE DEVIL

JOHN 8v44

[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.

ZECHARIAH 3 v 1

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.

We can overcome the opposition by keeping our friendship with Jesus close. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and follow his leading.

To be tempted is not a sin (MATTHEW 4v1, JAMES 1v13-15, I CORINTHIANS 10v13). Temptation becomes sin when we entertain it or act on it. God promises a way out from temptation. Paul describes a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit in GALATIANS 5:

GALATIANS 5 v 16-25

16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. 19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who do live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

v 16-18

What does it mean to live by the Spirit?

What is the assurance in v16?

Can you relate to the tension Paul describes in v17?

What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?

When Paul talks about being under the law he means trying to keep the rules.

Why does Paul contrast being led by the Spirit with being under the law?

v 19-21

Why does Paul describe these things as “acts of sinful nature”?

What is the “kingdom of God”?

What is Paul’s warning and what does it mean?

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

v 22-25

Paul contrasts the “acts” of the sinful nature with the “fruit” of the Spirit. What is the significance of the difference between the “acts” of the sinful nature and the “fruit” of the Spirit?

Why are “acts” plural and “fruit” singular?

When Paul says we’ve “crucified the sinful nature” he means we extinguish or subdue those passions and desires. How can we do this?

What does it mean to “keep in step” with the Spirit?

To live in the power of the Spirit we need to continually receive his love, wisdom, power, forgiveness and grace. We grow in these things as we spend time with him, praying, worshipping, reading and reflecting on the Bible. As we develop our friendship with God we learn to listen to him for his leading in our life and witness.

The Spirit’s transformation of our life is a process. Because God’s not finished with us, we’ll continue to make mistakes and sin. As we grow up in our faith the critical question is not whether we make mistakes, but how we respond to them. We grow to maturity over time by walking moment by moment with Jesus and in fellowship with others who are walking with him. The Christian lives by faith. We enjoy God’s forgiveness, power, peace and love as we trust his promises. We continue to follow him when it’s hard because we believe he brings the fullest life possible and he’s taking us somewhere worth going.

How would you summarise what we’ve learned about walking in the Spirit?

ONLINE 5

EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW THIS: THE GREAT COMMISSION

What is most important to God? What are his purposes for the world?

When you get to the end of your life, what do you want to see when you look back at how you lived?

The central purpose of human life is to know and love God: to share in his life, his heart and his purposes. In JOHN 15v15-16, Jesus speaks of the connection between friendship with God and sharing in his purposes: *“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”*

Knowing God cannot be separated from being involved with his work: as we share in his heart we become more deeply concerned with his purposes. As we become more involved with his purposes we enter more deeply into his heart. We don’t share in God’s business because he needs our help, as Paul says in ACTS 17v25: *“[God] is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.”* We share in his purposes to share in his heart. The call to be involved in God’s purposes in the world is recorded throughout the Bible. One place it’s particularly clear is at the end of Matthew’s gospel where Jesus’ last words before his ascension, often known as the Great Commission, are recorded:

MATTHEW 28v16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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. 20 And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Why are people’s last words significant?

We’re told that the disciples worshipped but also that they doubted. - **How is this an encouragement to us?**

The word “nation” means “ethnic group”, so not just political state but every tribe.

What difference does it make to know that Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth?

What is a disciple? What does it mean to “make disciples”?

What is the scope of this commission? Does this apply to us? Why or why not?

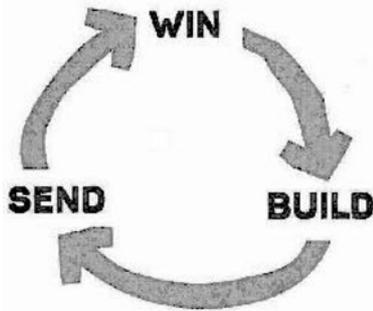
What’s the significance of baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

What’s the difference between “teaching” and “teaching to obey”?

What is Jesus’ promise?



The plot of the Bible between the creation of the world and final judgment is that God is rescuing a people who will be with him forever, restoring them to the purposes for which he created them and through them blessing the world. In calling us to make disciples from every people group on earth, he is calling us to share in what he is doing in the world. There are three stages in making disciples:



WIN (introduce people to Jesus)

BUILD (help them learn to follow him as a way of life)

SEND (help them to pass on to others everything they've received)

Making disciples is integral to being a disciple.

The process of winning people to Christ, building them in their faith and sending them to do the same with others is how spiritual movements get started. This is illustrated by the apostle Paul in 2 TIMOTHY 2v2: "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." We can see 4 generations of a growing movement:



If we spent a year focussing on winning, building and sending three people and equipping them to do the same with three others, then by the following year there would be four of us multiplying our faith. If we replicated this pattern of winning, building and sending every year, we would reach and disciple the world in 17 years. If the world's population doubled in that time it would only take an extra year. This is how the early church spread so quickly, as we see from the example of the church in Thessalonica:

1 THESSALONIANS 1v5-9

5 You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...

What did Paul do to pass on his faith?

Pick out every word in the passage about passing on the Christian life. What was the effect?

Why is modelling and imitation so important in making disciples?

How many generations of the movement are recorded?

What was so clear to everyone about the Thessalonian disciples?





God is saving a people to be with him for eternity to share in his heart and his purposes. He is doing this through successive generations of his disciples who are introduced to him, taught to follow him moment by moment and equipped to pass on what they've received to others. For two millennia, this is how the church has reached around the whole world.

Jesus is rescuing people as he empowers the humble obedience of successive generations of his followers. Being a disciple and making disciples belong together. You cannot have one without the other. As Jesus says in JOHN 15v5, 16: *"If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;... You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."*

How were you introduced to Christ and how have you been helped to follow him?

At the moment, who has God placed in your life that you could introduce to Jesus, help to follow him and equip to multiply others?

How could you get started?



ONLINE 6

NEW IDENTITY: SEEING YOURSELF GOD'S WAY



To be confident in a friendship with someone, you need some idea about who they are, how they see you and how they'll respond to you. When it comes to someone as big and powerful as God, it's even more important.

How do you think God feels about you right now? Why do you think that?
Are you defined by what you do, or is what you do defined by who you are? Why?
Where in your life do you see a connection between your beliefs and your behaviour?

Our practical living must flow out of a right understanding of who we are in Christ. Becoming a Christian is about much more than just being forgiven. It's about leaving our old life behind and receiving new life, becoming a new person. Paul talks about our old nature being "*crucified with Christ*" (GALATIANS 2v20), hence baptism is a "burial" of that old life (ROMANS 6v1-4).

In contrast, Jesus describes becoming a Christian as the start of a new life. That's one reason he talks about being "born again" (JOHN 1v12-13; 3v3-7). This new identity is the basis for how God sees us and relates to us. It also needs to become the basis of how we relate to God, to the world and how we see ourselves. This is one reason why the transformation of our lives is linked to the "*renewing of our minds*" (ROMANS 12v1-2). As Jesus says, it is as we "*know the truth*" - know in a deep, personal sense, that "*the truth will set us free*" (JOHN 8v31-32).

2 CORINTHIANS 5v16-21

16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In this passage, how does seeing people from a worldly point of view differ from seeing them as Christ sees them?

What is the old that has gone and the new that has come? (v17)

What does it mean to be reconciled to God?

How are we to share in God's purposes in verses 18-20?

What does it mean to be an ambassador?
How can we do this?

What does it mean for Christ to become sin for us?

What does it mean for us to become the righteousness of God in him?
What are the implications of this?



The following diagram attempts to express how Jesus has taken our sin upon himself and in exchange has given us his righteousness:



On the cross, Jesus took all our sin on himself. The pain of the cross isn't just physical agony, but the spiritual agony of the Son being separated from the Father, experiencing spiritual death in our place. In exchange, we've been given Christ's right standing with God, his eternal inheritance and adopted as children of God with free access to the Father.

How does God see us? What are the implications?

Consider the following verses and discuss these questions:

What do these verses tell me about my identity as someone "in Christ"?

How would my life be different if I really believed these truths?

ZEPHANIAH 3v17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

JOHN 15v15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

ROMANS 6v6-7 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

ROMANS 8v16-17 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

ROMANS 8v31-33 If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

I CORINTHIANS 6v9-11 Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by

Which of these promises do you find easiest to believe? What is the hardest?

We haven't earned our new identity; it's a free gift paid for by Jesus. As we learn to trust what God says of us, we begin to see ourselves as God sees us. We're then defined by our destiny, who we're becoming, rather than what has gone on in our past. Our growing security in God's love will transform the way we relate to others.

ONLINE 7

FOLLOWING JESUS

TOGETHER: GOD'S FAMILY

God does not want us to live our Christian lives in isolation. As CS Lewis put it, “*Several coals blaze brightly together, but put one on its own on the hearth and its fire soon goes out.*” When we invited Christ into our lives, we were born into God’s family (JOHN 1v12). He’s our Father and other believers are our brothers and sisters. His purpose is to build a people who share their lives and his love in such way that his glory is displayed to the world. This community is at the heart of God’s eternal plan. We belong to one another and need each other to grow as disciples of Jesus.

What’s been your experience of church?

What comes to mind when you think of church?

Jesus spells out the heart of the Christian faith in Matthew 22:

MATTHEW 22 v 36-40 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Our relationships with others are to be increasingly shaped by our relationship with God. (1 JOHN 4v7- 12) He longs to use us to help others grow in their faith and to use others to help us. God longs for his family to be close and to care for each other. Paul talks about our interdependence in 1 CORINTHIANS 12 v 12-27:

12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

v 12-14

Collectively we are the “body of Christ” because his Spirit lives in us and expresses his life through us.

Do you think the metaphor of a body in describing the Church is a good one? Why?

What do we learn about the make up of the body?

How does this passage answer the idea that “my faith is a personal thing and I can just worship God on my own”?

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 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!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

v 15-17

What do we learn about our relationship to the rest of God's people?

What specific gifts and abilities can you bring to God's family?

What, in general terms, can all believers bring to God's family?

What are the consequences for the body if we fail to play our part?

v 18-20

How does the picture of the body help us understand our diversity and our unity?

What encouragements are there in these verses for us?

v 21-27

What do we learn about the attitude we need to have towards other believers?

How does going to church help us?

Where do you specifically need help from others?

How easy do you find respecting and honouring those who are different from you?

Who is concerned for and committed to your spiritual life? Who are you committed to?

Acts gives us some wonderful pictures of what church life can be like

ACTS 2 v 42-46 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.



What excites you about this picture?

Historical details of the church have changed, but what principles behind the specifics challenge you?

“Fellowship” refers to a “deep sharing in common” - In what practical ways can you “devote yourself” to the fellowship?

If you're not already in a church, ask God for wisdom and discernment, and ask other believers you trust to point you in the right direction. Remember, no church is perfect; even the churches described in the Bible had big problems. The New Testament gives us some things to look out for:

- The Bible, not just the opinion of the preacher, is the authority for what's taught.
- The leaders affirm that Jesus is God in human form (JOHN 1:1-3, 14) and members are devoted to him rather than to church programmes.
- People have real, honest friendships and look out for one another.
- People are serious about praying, seeking and enjoying God.
- There is a concern to make Christ's Gospel known to others.
- The overall environment is one where you can be challenged in your spiritual growth and be given opportunities to serve others.

God has designed us to share our journey of faith with other believers. If we try to go it on our own, we miss out on a big part of what God has planned for us. We are part of God's family.



ONLINE 8

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD: MAKING THE MOST OF PRAYER

Why is communication important in any relationship? What happens if there is none?

What's been your experience of prayer? What answers to prayer have you seen?

Communication is foundational to any relationship, including our relationship with God. We can each communicate with God through prayer. Jesus was asked by his disciples for some basic instruction on how to pray. His response was not a formula but a guide on how to relate to God and what sort of things to talk to him about and ask of him.

MATTHEW 6v5-8 5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But 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. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

MATTHEW 6v9-13 9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

What were the hypocrites and pagans doing?

What are the key words in v5-8?

What do we learn from v9 about how we're to relate to God?

What would change in the world and in my life if God had his way all the time?

Hallowed means holy.

What things are included in “our daily bread”?

Why do we pray this every day?

What would happen if forgiveness slipped out of our prayer life?

Why is receiving forgiveness and forgiving others linked?

How should we pray for our own life with God?

Prayer isn't just about asking for things. God's not only interested in what we do, he's interested in us and in enjoying a relationship with us. Through prayer we meet with God, enjoy him, worship him and share our life with him. This deepening relationship can be illustrated as follows:

KNOWLEDGE
WE HAVE SOME
UNDERSTANDING
ABOUT GOD
THROUGH HIS WORD

FELLOWSHIP
WE BEGIN TO RELATE
TO GOD ON THE
BASIS OF WHAT WE
HAVE COME TO
KNOW

COMMUNION
WE SHARE THE DEEP
THINGS OF OUR
HEART WITH GOD
AND HE SHARES WITH
US

UNION →
OUR THOUGHTS,
AFFECTIONS, ATTITUDES
AND ACTIONS ARE
INCREASINGLY ONE
WITH GOD'S

The book of Psalms in the Old Testament is a book of prayers and songs of praise. They give us a window through which we can see into the author's relationship with God. The Psalms are not simply a shopping list of requests for God to do things. They show the authors opening up their hearts to God, often with an honesty that can seem quite shocking.

PSALM 13 v 1-6 | How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? 3 Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; 4 my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. 5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.

What do we learn about prayer from this Psalm?

How easy do we find it to share our thoughts and feelings with other people?

How easy do we find it to be this honest with God?

How does honestly sharing our heart with God affect our relationship with him?

What effect did praying have on the person who wrote the Psalm?

How does this Psalm reflect the diagram we looked at a moment ago?

We learn about Jesus' practice of prayer in LUKE 5v16: "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

What do we learn about Jesus' own practice of prayer? Why do you think Jesus went to "lonely" places?

How can we make prayer a part of our everyday life? When is the best time for you to have one to one time with Jesus? Where is a good place for you to do this?

If we ask God to help us as we pray, he will often drop specific things into our minds which he wants us to pray about. The following are some suggestions of things we could pray about:

- Putting things right with God that have gone wrong.
- Reflecting on God, his character, and his attitude towards us.
- Thanking God for the things he's done for us.
- Asking God for things we need.
- Sharing our hopes and fears, joys and sorrows with him.
- Asking him to help us move on in our relationship with him and with those around us.
- Praying for the Christians and non-Christians we know in their situations.
- Praying for people to come to faith.
- Praying for situations around us and in the world.
- Responding to what we're reading in the Bible.



The Bible says of Moses that he used to talk to God face to face as a man talks with his friend (Exodus 33v11). When we come humbly to God we have the undivided attention of the creator of the universe. As we know and trust this more and more deeply, prayer becomes one of the greatest privileges we can know. As we share ourselves and our lives with God, we are transformed and so is our world.



ONLINE 9

LIVING AND ACTIVE: THE POWER OF THE BIBLE

What's been your experience of reading the Bible?
What excites you about it? What do you find difficult?

The Bible is absolutely fundamental to Christianity. It's the creator's book to his creatures about himself and his creation. Apart from God's Word, the deepest and most important questions about our lives remain unanswered. In 2 TIMOTHY 3v16 Paul tells us that "All Scripture is God-breathed..."

What does it mean for all scripture to be "God-breathed"? Why is this important?

God has given us the Bible so we can get to know him better and live the life he created us for:

PSALM 19 v 7-11 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. 10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. 11 By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

What adjectives are used to describe God's words?

What effect does his Word have on us? (What verbs are used?)

How does the word have these effects?

Have you experienced these things in your life?

A Christian group called the Navigators use the simple illustration of a hand to help us think through how we can get to grips with God's Word. The aim is not simply to know what the Bible says, but to have it shape our lives, our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, relationships and actions. As we hear, read, study, memorise and meditate on the Bible, God works deeply in us and begins to bring our life into line with his.



The Bible is not just a work of philosophy or a set of good ideas, but the very words of God to the world. Our response to God's Word accurately reflects our response to God himself; whether we take it seriously and seek to understand and obey it, or whether we pay it lip service and ignore its blueprint for living.

MATTHEW 7:21-29 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' 24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." 28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

v 21-23

What might cause us to suspect these people are true followers of Jesus?

What marks them out as fake followers?

What is your reaction to these verses?

v 24-27

What does building the house represent?

What do the wise and foolish builders have in common?

What distinguishes them?

What are the consequences?

Where does this challenge you?

How can we evaluate how effectively we're putting into practice what God says?

v 28-29

Why does Jesus' teaching have authority?

How do you experience this in your life?

There are four dimensions for us to really get to grips with the Bible and apply it. The order may vary, but ultimately we should look to engage with all four:

HEAR / READ

We find out what God says

UNDERSTAND

We figure out what God means and how it makes sense

BELIEVE

We are deeply convinced by the truth and goodness of what God says

OBEY

We work out how to put what God has said into practise and do it

In our lives, how can we recognise the difference between understanding, believing and obeying God's word?



Until we've obeyed God's word, we're still foolish builders. As you come to read the Bible, pray that God would help you understand it, believe it and embrace what he says through it. Read a passage and then re-read it slowly, reflecting on the meaning of what you've read. As you read, consider the following questions:

Do I clearly understand what this passage is teaching? How does it relate to me? Is it a reality in my life? If not, how can it become so?

Why is the Bible vital for us to grow as a disciple?

How can we make it part of our everyday life?



ONLINE LEADERS GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Jesus doesn't just offer us hope when we die, he teaches us how to live lives of joy, love and significance in this world. The Christian life is meant to be lived in moment by moment friendship with the Living God and to bring a foretaste of heaven to the broken and hurting world around us.

When we're born we need to grow and learn how to live in the world. In the same way when we're born again spiritually we need to learn how our new life works. It's God who causes us to grow, but he does so with our willing involvement. Looking at what the Bible has to say, Online is a nine-session series designed to help you get to grips with how to build a strong and secure friendship with God himself and how to make an impact for him wherever he takes you.

THE PRINCIPLES OF LEADING ONLINE

Online has been designed to be used with other people, either one-to-one or in a small group. It's probably most effective in groups of 3-5. The following tips will help you use it with others. Pray before you meet up with the others that God will speak to you as you study the card, and pray for each member between sessions.

Whose job is it?

As you lead, it will help to reflect on both God's role and your role in the group:

GROUP LEADERS ROLE

- To create a relaxed, friendly atmosphere
- To model honesty and willingness to learn
- To take the group through the questions and help them engage with the Bible
- To ensure everyone is involved and no one dominates discussion

GOD'S ROLE

- To give people the desire for growth and a deeper walk with him
- To convict of sin, righteousness and judgement
- To reveal spiritual truths to those who are seeking him
- To cause their spiritual growth
- To help you lead well as you share his truths with others



THE HOLY SPIRIT DIRECTS

Whilst there's specific teaching content on each card, Online has been designed to provide space in which the Holy Spirit can direct each session according to the needs of the group. Because of this it's important that the leader allows space for people to engage with the content, the Bible and their experience and understanding. Every card includes open questions which give the opportunity for many different perspectives and insights from each member of the group. The cards aim to direct the group to the Bible and allow it to speak into people's lives, whilst maintaining a focus on the theme. In addition, each card has a number of questions which encourage the group to share their personal experiences of what is being discussed.

FACILITATING, NOT TEACHING

The leader's role is to facilitate the group to explore the theme of the card, the Bible and the group members' personal experiences in that area. The leader is a facilitator for this, not a teacher. This is not the context for the leader to present lots of additional material in a lecturing style. The aim is to create a context in which the leader and the rest of the group discover and learn together. People learn much more deeply if they explore and discover truths for themselves rather than simply being presented with the answer. It also engages them more fully with the material they're looking at.

During the study, it's helpful for the leader to get different members of the group to read the paragraphs on the cards that are not specifically questions. When such a paragraph has been read it's helpful to ask if there are any comments or questions about what's been read. It is also helpful to get different people to read out the scriptures which are referred to and for everyone in the group to turn to each one as it is read.

LETTING THE BIBLE SPEAK

It's important to remember that as each member of the group comes to the Bible, they bring their own set of thoughts, hopes, fears, understandings, experiences, assumptions and circumstances. Some of these will be known to the individuals and the group as a whole and some won't. Because of this the Holy Spirit may speak to different members of the group very differently from the same scripture. Different dimensions, insights and applications will jump out to each individual. This is healthy and a sign that people are really engaging with the Bible and with their own experience in light of it.

The aim of the studies is to help people grapple with understanding and applying what they're learning in their real life circumstances. Occasionally things may come up which are blatantly error or heresy, in which case the leader will need to gently correct this. However, the leader and the rest of the group should be prepared to discover fresh insights and understanding from each question as they go through.

INVOLVING EVERYONE

Each member of the group should be involved in each session. The questions about our own experience should be addressed to each person in the group, although people shouldn't be pressured to share beyond that which they are comfortable. Hopefully, trust within the group will grow as the weeks go by. Some people will need help to be drawn into the group or to stay involved with the discussion. This can be done by directing open questions to individuals, e.g. "What do you think Simon?"





LIFE SHARING

Online aims to convey basic principles for living the Christian life, but it's vital that those principles are worked out and applied in the individual lives of those in the group. ONLINE is not simply about learning principles but about getting to know each other, about sharing joys and struggles, about learning to walk together as God's people and helping each other along the road. Central to this is learning to be honest and real with each other about what's really going on in our lives. There are plenty of questions on the cards which give opportunity to be vulnerable and talk about what's really going on in each other's lives. This gives the possibility of real application, accountability, prayer and friendship. At the start of each Online session it's great to spend a few minutes catching up with what each member's been doing since the last session and how they've found life with God. At the end of each session, take some time to pray for each other.

GRACE, NOT LAW

With the personal questions people should be encouraged to be as honest as they're willing to be, but not pushed to disclose things without a sufficient level of trust and love in the group. It's really important to remember that the personal questions are not examinations or performance reviews. Real honesty and transformation takes place in a context of unconditional love. The freedom to admit failure and the acceptance of the group in the face of struggles are prerequisites to giving each other the support, friendship, encouragement and prayer needed to find victory in those areas.

SPECIFIC, NOT GENERAL

If people are sharing generally, where appropriate encourage them to move from the general towards the specific. As the group leader, you may well not know the specifics before they tell them to the group and you won't know whether or not they are prepared to be more specific and therefore vulnerable.

One way to approach this is to invite them to further disclosure without demanding it. You can do this by asking permission to ask further, e.g. "Can I ask why this has been a hard week for you?" This way of phrasing the question gives people the option to say no.

APPLYING TRUTH

The aim of Online is not to end up with a head full of right answers, but to work out day to day how to walk with God. With this in mind, it's important to explore how to use the concepts that the group is learning in every day life. Each study has application questions and reflection verses to be done between the sessions. The previous card and its application should be very briefly reviewed at the start of each session. It's also good to pray for specific things that people want to apply at the end of each session and ask them how they're doing with the application at the next session.

MULTIPLYING LEADERSHIP

Online is a very simple tool for helping people to get a clear grounding in how to live out a life committed to following Jesus. It has been designed so that people who have gone through the material will in turn be able to take others through it. This has two key benefits. Firstly, an individual will learn the content in a much deeper way from taking other people through the studies than simply going through them as part of a group. It also means that more leaders are being trained up so that more people can benefit from doing the studies. There are three ways to emphasise this element of Online. Firstly, at the prayer time at the end of





each session each person should be encouraged to pray for their friends outside of the group. This helps keep the group outward looking. Secondly, the group members should take it in turns to lead different sessions and receive feedback to help them develop their leading skills. Thirdly, it should be emphasised that you don't complete ONLINE by finishing the ninth card but having done them, to take others through the cards.

