



What New Believers Need to Know

Facilitator Notes

Why do we call this 4-part Bible study series the “Starting Line?”

Hebrews 12:1 - *let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* (NIV)

The writer of Hebrews uses a metaphor that compares the Christian life in this world to a race. Like a race, the Christian life has a beginning and an end... it begins the moment you are saved and ends when you die. The Christian life requires discipline, endurance and a determination to succeed. This Bible study series was developed to help new Christians to make a good start in their new life.

- Whether you are a new Christian yourself, or are in a position to encourage new Christians, there are some key things that are important to have settled in your mind...

1. You have the promise of eternal life

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 – NIV).

How is a person saved?

God's Word says that when a person believes in Jesus, that He is God in the flesh as He claimed to be and that His death on the cross paid the penalty for their sin, they are given eternal life. This means that someday when their physical body wears out and dies, their soul will go to be in the Lord's presence to spend eternity with Him!

2. You are saved by faith

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 – NIV).

How does a person earn favor with God to be saved?

This is a trick question... no one can't earn salvation through their good works. A person's salvation is based purely upon their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Even the faith to trust in the work of Jesus on the cross is a free gift of God.

3. You're not saved by feelings

We live by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7 – NIV)

If a person is saved, shouldn't they feel saved?

Good feelings are nice to have, but feelings do not prove whether you're saved or not. There may be times when you "feel" that God is close to you, and other times when you "feel" that He's not. Remember that God has promised us, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). This is true whether we feel His presence or not.

4. You may experience doubts

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9 – NIV)

Can a person who doubts their salvation really be saved?

One of most common things that happen to a new believer is that demons whisper doubts into our thoughts: "You're not really saved," or "nothing really happened to you." But don't buy into these lies and deceptions! If you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then you are saved, regardless of whether you feel it or not. We can have confidence in our salvation because of the promises in God's Word. God will honor His promises because His very character is at stake.

5. You are forgiven of all your sins

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 – NIV)

How can a person be saved if they still sin?

When we are saved, we have a new spirit which enables us to commune with God but our body and soul are yet to be resurrected. So in our mortal bodies we still have a sinful nature that causes us to fall short of the glory of God. Over time, believers get better in eliminating sin from their lives if they are actively pursuing their relationship with God. But until we're resurrected, we'll struggle with sin. The good news is that God forgives us of our sins when we acknowledge them before Him and make changes to avoid the sin in the future.

How can a person be saved if they committed an unforgivable sin?

Matthew 12:31 - *every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.* (NIV)

The only unforgivable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by not believing His testimony about Jesus Christ. So it is only possible for unbelievers to commit the unforgivable sin. If you are trusting in the work of Jesus as being the substitutionary payment for the penalty of your sin, God has forgiven every sin you've ever committed, regardless of how awful or evil they may have been.

6. You're not perfect, just forgiven

there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... (Romans 8:1 – NIV).

How can God forgive sins that are committed over and over?

Being a Christian doesn't mean that mistakes will not be made, but it means that they are forgiven of sin and have a goal to live like Christ. Christians should never let the condemnation of demons cause them to lose their joy about being a child of God if they stumble or make a mistake! God loves His children and wants them to ask Him to forgive them (1 John 1:9), then He wants them to get back on their feet and keep walking for Him! Thus we should be making continual improvement in overcoming habitual sins.

Since God forgives Christians their sin, does that mean Christians are free to sin?

Christians are not free to sin – sin always has consequences associated with it and sin comes between us and our relationship with God. Those who think having salvation is a license to sin need to question their salvation because those who are truly saved will want to please the Lord.

7. You are a new creation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
(2 Corinthians 5:17 – NIV).

What is different about the person that is saved?

At the moment a person accepts Jesus into their life, God came into that person's inner being by His Spirit...

1 Corinthians 6:19 - *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.* (NIV)

The person who trusts in Jesus for their salvation did not merely become a better person, they were "born again" spiritually as a brand new person! The Holy Spirit convicts us of things through our conscience that we need to correct to be more like Christ. Christians have a new world view and new values.

8. You must keep living for Christ

²¹*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.* ²²*But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—* ²³*if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.* (Colossians 1:21-23 – NIV)

Can a person be saved if they stop living the life of a Christian?

It is important to understand that if a person is truly saved, they will have a "continued" relationship with the Lord. The person who is truly saved will want to continue living the Christian life out of gratitude for what Christ has done for them.

Is it possible to fall out of fellowship with Christ and still be saved?

It is certainly possible for a person to fall out of fellowship with Christ and still be saved, the parable of the prodigal son teaches us that truth (see Luke 15:11-24). But living in the far country is a dangerous place for a person to be since it could be that they are deceiving themselves that they really are saved. The only way for a person to be sure of their salvation is to continue in their relationship with God.

9. You need to go to Church

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." (1 John 3:14 – NIV)

Do Christians really need to go to church if they are saved?

The technical answer to this question is no, a Christian does not need to go to church to be saved. But practically speaking, the true Christian will be compelled to become part of a body of believers because they love other Christians. If you truly love someone, you'll want to be with them.

How does it help Christians to go to church?

The more exposure a person gets to God's Word, the more they will grow spiritually. We also need encouragement in our faith that we can only get from fellow Christians. Participation in church activities enables a person to be an encourager themselves and to serve others. Also, it is important to participate in corporate worship as we have been commanded to: *"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* (Hebrews 10:25 – NIV).

10. You need to pray regularly

"pray continually" (1Thessalonians 5:17 – NIV)

How important is prayer in the life of a Christian?

It is not possible to have a relationship with someone if there is no communication with them. Likewise, a person is deceiving themselves that they have a relationship with God if they don't seek communication with Him. Prayer is how we speak to God. We should speak to God throughout the day as we would a close companion. We should thank Him for His blessings and ask Him to help us with our problems. It is also important to set aside a special quiet time to just be alone with God. As we experience God answering our prayers, we grow in our faith which is necessary to have a healthy relationship.

11. You need to study the Bible daily

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:2-3 – NIV)

How important is studying the Bible in the life of a Christian?

Studying the Bible is the flip-side of prayer in furthering our relationship with Christ. We speak to God in our prayers, and He speaks to us through His Word. Reading and studying the Bible is absolutely necessary to grow spiritually...

2 Timothy 2:15 - Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (NIV)

Those who are saved have a desire to spend time in God's Word – as a newborn baby desiring his mother's milk.

12. You need to be baptized in water

"...Repent and be baptized, every one of you..." (Acts 2:38 – NIV)

Is it necessary to be baptized in water to be saved?

The technical answer to this question is no because baptism is a good work and we can do nothing to earn salvation. Certainly one of the thieves who died on a cross next to Jesus was saved and he did not have to be baptized (see Luke 23:39-43). However, as a practical matter, genuine born-again Christians will want to be baptized because this is the **pattern Christ set** for us and **we are commanded** to be baptized...

Matthew 28:19 - Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

Water baptism in itself (not to be confused with baptism in Holy Spirit), does not save you or wash away your sins, but is an act of your obedience in God's Word. It symbolically

shows that you have died to the old sinful life, and have risen in the newness of the Life of Christ.

Acts 18:8 - Many of the people who heard Him believed and were baptized. (LB)

A third reason to be baptized is that it **demonstrates that you're really a believer**. Baptism doesn't make you a Christian, it just shows that you are a Christian.

- A wedding ring doesn't make anyone married, it is merely a symbol of the commitment that did make them married. One day I made a commitment to my wife before God and witnesses by saying "I do". That commitment is what makes me married, not the ring. If I were to lose this ring, I'd still be married. Like the wedding ring, baptism is an outward symbol of an inward commitment.

Baptism just says to the world, "I'm not ashamed to tell the whole world what's happened to me. I've given my life to Christ." Jesus said...

Matthew 10:32-33 – "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (NIV)

What do the following Scripture passages have to say about the meaning of baptism?

*For when you are **baptized**, you were **buried** with Christ, and in baptism you were also **raised** with Christ.* (Colossians 2:12 – LB)

Baptism illustrates Christ's burial and resurrection...

Christ died for our sins... He was buried...and He rose again. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 – LB)

Baptism is a symbol of a burial and resurrection. Just like Jesus Christ died and was buried in the ground for three days and then rose again.

When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. The old life has passed away and a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17 – LB)

The second thing that baptism illustrates is your new life as a Christian. In the Bible, there was no such thing as a person claiming to be a Christian and not be baptized. It was automatic. You were baptized as soon as you gave your life to Christ.

*By our baptism then, we were **buried** with Him and shared His death, in order that, just as Christ was **raised** from the dead...so also **we may live a new life!***

(Romans 6:4 – LB)

Why should a person be baptized by immersion?

As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. (Matthew 3:16 – LB)

At Creekside we baptize the way they did in the Bible -- putting people all the way under the water...

- Jesus was baptized that way
- Every baptism in the Bible was by immersion. Example: *Then both Philip and the man went down into the water and Philip baptized him. Then they came up out of the water. (Acts 38-39 – LB)*
- Complete immersion is what the Greek word *baptizo* means, “to immerse or dip under water”.
- Complete immersion best symbolizes a burial and resurrection.

Who should be baptized?

Those who believed and accepted His message were baptized... (Acts 2:41 – LB)

In the Bible, every person who has believed in Christ were baptized...

Those who believed and accepted His message were baptized. (Acts 8:13 – LB)

There is only one qualification in the Bible to be baptized. You've got to believe in Christ. Obviously you've got to be old enough to understand what that's all about.

When should a person be baptized?

Those who believed...were baptized...that day! (Acts 2:41 – LB)

Again, the biblical model is what is important here, and this is for a new believer to be baptized as soon as possible after they become a believer, upon realizing its importance.

There's no reason to delay. After you've decided to receive Christ you ought to be baptized.

13. You need to live a holy life

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Corinthians 7:1 – NIV).

Why is it necessary for Christians to purge sin from their lives?

As we have mentioned, Christians are not perfect but God wants us to "aim" toward perfection. That is, our goal must be to grow in submitting ourselves to the new nature of His Spirit in our inner self, following the example of Jesus, and living a godly and wholesome life...

Hebrews 12:14 - Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (NIV)

After a Christian turns from a life of sin and asks the Lord to forgive their sins, he expects us to seek to grow closer to Him each day. This means dealing with our sinful thoughts and behavior which displease God. God gives His children a

desire to obey Him and do those things that are pleasing in His sight...

Colossians 1:10 - And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. (NIV)

As we grow in our relationship with God, His strength in our life will increase to overcome sinful behavior and habits.

14. You need to be filled with the Holy Spirit

be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18 – NIV)

How may we be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Each of us makes multiple choices every day. The extent to which we make choices that honor God determines how filled we are with the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is an act of the will. The filling of the Holy Spirit refers to our yielding our lives to be under God's gracious control. This seems contradictory and is at odds with the prevailing world-view: giving up control of your life to be in control... but it is a clear Biblical concept...

Matthew 10:39 - Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (NIV)

The Bible also says that those who are living in a state separate from God are in bondage...

Galatians 5:1 - It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (NIV)

Those with no relationship to God have no choice but to sin and face the consequences of sin. Christians have a choice to obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit so that they do not have to sin.

15. You need to tell others about Christ

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33 – NIV)

Why should Christians tell others about Christ?

God saved us for a purpose. If He didn't intend for us to share the good news about Jesus with others, He would just take us out of this world when we are saved. But God in grace chooses to work through us to increase our blessing from Him. The person who doesn't openly declare their relationship to Christ before others, needs to question if they really are saved. If we have the cure for spiritual cancer, it would be criminal to withhold it from those who desperately need it.