

Four Steps for God

Introduction

Congratulations on trusting Jesus Christ as your Savior! Now that you are a Christian, God wants you to learn some basic truths that will help you live in ways that honor and please Him.

Our study will center around the biblical record of the first people who became Christians and how their lives changed. This story will be easier to understand if you know a little about the events that led up to it.

Jesus Christ, God's Son, had been crucified a few weeks earlier. He died willingly on the cross to pay for our sins. The good news is that Jesus didn't stay in the grave - He rose from the dead. (Christians celebrate that event on Easter.) Jesus talked to His chosen messengers, the apostles, after He arose. He told them to tell everyone, everywhere, the good news of His love. What you're about to read is the story of what happened the first time they obeyed His command. We'll pick up the story after Peter finishes preaching his first sermon:

NOW WHEN THEY HEARD THIS, THEY WERE PRICKED IN THEIR HEART, AND SAID UNTO PETER AND TO THE REST OF THE APOSTLES, MEN AND BRETHREN, WHAT SHALL WE DO? THEN PETER SAID UNTO THEM, REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST. FOR THE PROMISE IS UNTO YOU, AND TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND TO ALL THAT ARE AFAR OFF, EVEN AS MANY AS THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL CALL. AND WITH MANY OTHER WORDS DID HE TESTIFY AND EXHORT, SAYING, SAVE YOURSELVES FROM THIS UNTOWARD GENERATION. THEN THEY THAT GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD WERE BAPTIZED: AND THE SAME DAY THERE WERE ADDED UNTO THEM ABOUT THREE THOUSAND SOULS. AND THEY CONTINUED STEDFASTLY IN THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP, AND IN BREAKING OF BREAD, AND IN PRAYERS. AND FEAR CAME UPON EVERY SOUL: AND MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS WERE DONE BY THE APOSTLES. AND ALL THAT BELIEVED WERE TOGETHER, AND HAD ALL THINGS COMMON; AND SOLD THEIR POSSESSIONS AND GOODS, AND PARTED THEM TO ALL MEN, AS EVERY MAN HAD NEED. AND THEY, CONTINUING DAILY WITH ONE ACCORD IN THE TEMPLE, AND BREAKING BREAD FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, DID EAT THEIR MEAT WITH GLADNESS AND SINGLENESS OF HEART, PRAISING GOD, AND HAVING FAVOUR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE. AND THE LORD ADDED TO THE CHURCH DAILY SUCH AS SHOULD BE SAVED. (ACT 2:37-47)

Over the next few weeks, you'll be studying a few of the big ideas from this Bible passage. We'll focus on these changes in their lives:

1. They were baptized.
2. They were added to the church.
3. They listened to God's message and His messengers.
4. They talked to God in prayer.

How to Use This Booklet

The *Daily Bible Reading* section contains four weeks of Bible readings for you to study. Each reading has some brief comments to help you understand the passages and some room to write your own comments and questions.

The *Things to Pray About* section gives you a place to list the things you want to pray for each week.

Finally, each week's study ends with a few practical application questions for you to answer in the *Things to Think About* section.

Week 1: They Were Baptized

Daily Bible Reading

☐ *Day 1: Acts 2:37-47, Matthew 3:1-6*

When Peter's audience asked "What shall we do?", Peter's answer was "repent and be baptized." What does it mean to repent? In the Bible, it usually means thinking differently about sin. When we do something God says not to do, or we fail to do something God says we should do, it is sin. Repentance is agreeing with God about your sins. When you repent, you're saying "God, I agree with You - what I've done is wrong." When you really change your mind about your sins, your actions will change, too. John the Baptist called this "fruits meet for repentance."

BUT WHEN HE SAW MANY OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES COME TO HIS BAPTISM, HE SAID UNTO THEM, O GENERATION OF VIPERS, WHO HATH WARNED YOU TO FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME? BRING FORTH THEREFORE FRUITS MEET FOR REPENTANCE: (MAT 3:7-8)

In other words, John was saying, "If you have really repented, you should live differently."

When folks repented, they got baptized. It was a public way of showing that they agreed with God about their sins. Baptism did not wash away their sins, but it did proclaim the fact that they were dirty and that God had cleansed them. It showed the people around them what had happened in their hearts.

☐ *Day 2: Matthew 3:13-17*

Notice that Jesus set an example for us by being baptized. Even though He didn't have any sins to confess, He associated with sinners by being baptized.

☐ *Day 3: Matthew 28:18-20*

Jesus commanded those who believe on Him to be baptized. It's an important part of being a disciple.

☐ *Day 4: Acts 8:29-38, Acts 9:17-18*

In the Bible, baptism always follows belief. Biblical baptism happens after salvation. Getting baptized before you get saved is pointless.

☐ ***Day 5: Acts 16:14-15, Acts 18:7-8***

Baptism follows salvation. What you see when you read through the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the Book of Acts is that folks got baptized right away. They didn't attend six weeks of classes first. They didn't go on probation for a month to make sure they really "got it." They were saved, baptized and added to the church. That's why baptism is sometimes called "the first act of obedience."

☐ ***Day 6: Acts 16:29-34***

Baptism was so important that the Philippian jailer and his family were baptized the very same night they were saved. Paul and Silas baptized them before they ate.

☐ ***Day 7: Romans 6:1-5***

Baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. That's why we baptize people by putting them completely under water. Just sprinkling a little water on a person isn't baptism any more than sprinkling a little dirt on someone is burial. Notice that John baptized in a place where there was lots of water (John 3:23).

Things to Think About

1. Have you been baptized since you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior?
2. If not, where and when will you be baptized?
3. What family members, friends, neighbors and coworkers would you like to be present when you get baptized? Will you invite them?

Things to Pray About (Your Prayer List)

Week 2: They Were Added to the Church

Daily Bible Reading

☐ *Day 1: Hebrews 10:23-25*

Reread Acts 2:37-47. After these new believers were baptized, the Bible says they were added to them - the church. Those 3,000 new converts became part of something new and exciting. They became members of the church at Jerusalem.

God commanded His people not to forsake the gathering of themselves together, yet some people don't think church is important.

☐ *Day 2: 1 Timothy 3:14-15*

Paul called the church "the pillar and ground of the truth" when he wrote to Timothy. When you think about what church to join, the most important consideration is how well that church proclaims and practices the truth of the Bible. That's more important than the music, or the building, or the preacher's style.

☐ *Day 3: Acts 20:28, Ephesians 2:20-22, Hebrews 13:7, 17*

God gives churches leaders. He makes these leaders responsible for the spiritual care and feeding of His people. This care is one of the important reasons for becoming part of a local church. Unlike preachers on television, these men of God know you, pray for you and help you personally. The wise person will support, encourage and pray for the leaders God has placed over him.

☐ *Day 4: Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:13-18*

Just like your own body, the church is made up of many different parts that work together. Paul used this picture of the church when he wrote to the Romans and the Corinthians. In both cases, he was reminding them that each person in the church has a work to do. God puts us together in church so that we can serve and help one another with our unique abilities. You may be able to listen to preaching on television, but it's tough to use your gifts in a TV church.

☐ ***Day 5: Ephesians 4:12-13; Romans 8:28-29***

One of the main goals God has for the church is to help its members become like Jesus Christ. Paul told the Ephesians that God wants all of us to reach "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." In other words, God wants us all to measure up to Jesus. Pastors and teachers help us pursue that goal by explaining the Bible to us and encouraging us to live it. Christians in a church help each other reach that goal by setting good examples, encouraging each other and praying for one another.

☐ ***Day 6: John 17:21-22, Galatians 3:26-28, John 13:35***

God wants the members of His church to be united. Jesus said our love for each other would be what tells the world that we are His followers. What we have in common because of our relationship with Jesus Christ should overcome our differences. People of all races, ages, backgrounds and bank balances can find common ground in Christ.

☐ ***Day 7: Ephesians 5:25-27***

Let's close out this weeks lesson by considering the idea that the church belongs to Jesus Christ. It's not a club where people vote on how they want it to be run. God has given us His instructions in the Bible and we must operate His church His way.

It's exciting to know that the church belongs to Christ. It is His and He has committed Himself to care for it, protect it, and help it become all He wants it to be.

Things to Think About

1. Are you a member of a Bible preaching and Bible practicing church?
2. If not, will you start looking for a church that preaches and practices the Bible?
3. When you find a good church, will you join it and do all you can to help it reach God's goals?

Things to Pray About (Your Prayer List)

Week 3: They Listened to God's Message and His Messengers

Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." The Bible is food for our soul. Without it, you will be not be spiritually strong and healthy. You should desire the Bible just like a newborn wants mother's milk:

AS NEWBORN BABES, DESIRE THE SINCERE MILK OF THE WORD, THAT YE MAY GROW THEREBY: (1PETER 2:2)

Daily Bible Reading

☐ Day 1: 2 Peter 1:19-21, 2 Timothy 3:15-17;

Reread Acts 2:37-47. The new Christians listened to the Bible teaching of the church leaders. The Bible says they "continued stedfastly" in it. It also says they continued in the temple daily. They were sincere and consistent.

When the church first started, people didn't have access to their own personal copies of the Scriptures. Not only that, but the Bible wasn't complete yet. So, much of what God had to say to people, He spoke through His apostles and prophets. Today, we have the privilege of having our own personal copies of the Bible.

☐ Day 2: John 14:25-26, John 16:12-14, 1 John 2:27

When you became a Christian, God gave you His Holy Spirit. One thing the Holy Spirit does is to help us understand the Scriptures. Ask for His help as you read.

☐ Day 3: Ephesians 4:11-14

Even though the Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible, God still uses pastors and teachers to help in the process. He appoints these spiritually gifted servants to help us understand and apply His Word. They keep watch over our souls like a shepherd watches his sheep.

☐ Day 4: Psalm 1:1-3, Joshua 1:8

We need to meditate on God's Word to understand it. Meditating on the Bible doesn't involve chanting or candles. Rather, biblical meditation involves deep, focused, prayerful thinking about what you've read. The goal of this meditation is to understand what you've read thoroughly and practically.

☐ ***Day 5: Acts 17:11***

No matter how gifted the teacher, we need to compare what they say to what the Bible says. The Bible is always right, but the teacher could be wrong. The Bereans were commended for comparing the apostle Paul teaching to the Scriptures said (Acts 17:11)

☐ ***Day 6: Psalm 119:8-16***

Here are some thoughts about God's Word from Psalm 119:8-16:

- Be committed to keeping (obeying) God's Word (8).
- Listening to it will help us clean up our lives (9).
- We need to study sincerely (10).
- We need God's help to obey God's Word (10).
- Knowing God's Word by heart will help keep us from sin (11).
- Human intellect alone isn't enough to understand the Bible. He must teach us (12).
- Learn God's Word so you can declare it to others (13).
- Value the Bible (14).
- To understand God's Word, we need to do more than skim it. We need to meditate on the Scriptures (15).
- You've gotta love it (16)!

☐ ***Day 7: Matthew 7:24-27, James 1:22-25***

No matter how you learn the Bible, your ultimate goal should be to do what it says. Christians are not supposed to do what they like and ignore the rest. We are to be doers of the Word, not just hearers. So, as you do your daily Bible readings, look for ways to put into practice what you read. When you listen to a sermon, evaluate yourself and make the changes that are needed in your life.

Things to Think About

1. Do you read God's Word daily?
2. Are you being taught the Bible by gifted teachers and preachers regularly?
3. Are you living what you're learning?

Things to Pray About (Your Prayer List)

Week 4: They Talked to God in Prayer

The original 120 disciples were together in one accord right before Peter's sermon (Acts 2:1). What were they doing? According to Acts 1:13-14, they were probably praying. The 3,000 new converts followed their example and continued in prayer, too.

Daily Bible Reading

☐ *Day 1: Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7; Proverbs 3:5-6*

Prayer is one of the great privileges of being a Christian. The loving, powerful Creator is your Father in Heaven. He doesn't want you to worry about anything. He tells us to cast every care on Him because He cares for us.

☐ *Day 2: Matthew 6:5-8*

As Jesus taught during the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6), prayer is not about putting on a show for others, or about mindlessly repeating some memorized prayer. You don't need to use thous and thees in your prayer for God to listen. You don't have to pray the same thing over and over to get Him to listen, either.

☐ *Day 3: Matthew 6:9-13*

Jesus gave His followers a pattern to use in prayer - sometimes known as the Lord's Prayer. He didn't intend for us to repeat the words of this prayer, but to use it as a model to build our prayers on.

Notice that the Lord's Prayer begins and ends with Who God is. That's the most important part of prayer - asking the right Person for help. Prayer isn't just wishful thinking, or soothing your mind, it's real communication with a real person.

The Lord's Prayer calls us to submit ourselves to God - to establish His reign as the King of our lives. Then we ask to meet the needs in our lives. This is represented by "bread" in the prayer.

Even after you get saved, you will still sin. The model prayer also deals with confession and forgiveness. God has promised to forgive your sins when you confess them to Him:

IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS, AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE NOT SINNED, WE MAKE HIM A LIAR, AND HIS WORD IS NOT IN US. MY LITTLE CHILDREN, THESE THINGS WRITE I UNTO YOU, THAT YE SIN NOT. AND IF ANY MAN SIN, WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER, JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS: (1JOHN 1:9-2:1)

God expects us to be as ready to forgive those who sin against us as He is when we sin against Him.

☐ ***Day 4: Matthew 7:7-12***

God is a good and loving Father. He wants to meet our needs. Prayer is one of the main ways He does that. If we want to receive, we must ask. If we want to find, we must seek. If we want God to open doors for us, we must knock in prayer.

☐ ***Day 5: Mark 1:35-37, Mark 6:46, Matthew 14:23, Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12***

Jesus was busy. People constantly wanted His attention. He could have worked non-stop. But He set aside time to pray. He would send the crowds away. He would go off to a solitary place and pray. Jesus had to make time to pray and you will, too.

☐ ***Day 6: Luke 18:1-7***

We need to pray and keep on praying. Jesus told a story in Luke 18 to remind us that we can't faint in prayer. If what you're seeking in prayer doesn't mean enough to you to keep asking, why should it matter enough to God to answer you. What a shame it would be to stop one day short of an answer!

☐ ***Day 7: James 4:2-3, Isaiah 59:1-2, Psalm 66:18, 1 John 3:22***

God's wants to hear and answer our prayers, but many Christians don't ask, so they do without. "Ye have not," James said, "because ye ask not." We don't pray because we don't make time to pray. Even when you pray faithfully, you might not always get the answer you want. There are several reasons why this might happen:

1. Sin in your life that is closing God's ears to your prayers.
2. You have wrong motives: you want good things for bad reasons.
3. Your timing is off - God may be saying "Wait."
4. God has something better in mind.

Things to Think About

1. Do you take time to pray each day?
2. Are you using the model for prayer that Jesus gave us?
3. Is sin in your life holding back the answers to your prayers?

Things to Pray About

What's Next?

Find a church that preaches and practices the Bible, and join it. Be faithful to the church services.

Start reading through the Book of John to get acquainted with your Savior, Jesus. Read some every day. Pray daily, too.

Use these online resources to help you grow:

The home page of Calvary Baptist Church, which broadcasts live church services each Sunday and has an archive of past sermons.

<http://www.calvarybaptistministries.org>

The Progressive Devotions web site has additional studies on Bible study, prayer, and other topics:

<http://www.progressivedevotions.com/bible-study-basics/>

<http://www.progressivedevotions.com/the-power-of-prayer/>