

THE CHRISTIAN ADVENTURE

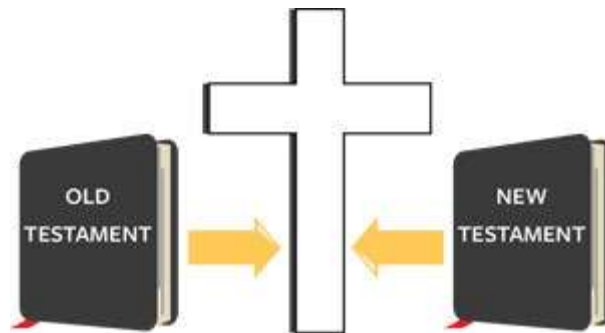
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The Christian's Certainty

Bill Bright

Believers of the Old Testament times looked forward to the coming of their Messiah. New Testament believers look back to the cross and the resurrection. Both of these events culminate in the unique person of Jesus Christ.



The apostle Paul says, *"It was through what His Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to Him -- all things in Heaven and on Earth -- for Christ's death on the cross has made peace with God for all by His blood...and now as a result Christ has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are standing there before Him with nothing left against you...the only condition is that you fully believe the Truth, standing in it steadfast and firm, strong in the Lord, convinced of the Good News that Jesus died for you, and never shifting from trusting Him to save you."* (Colossians 1:20-23)

Hundreds of millions of people around the world have discovered this marvelous "path" because of Jesus' death on the cross and His bodily resurrection from the dead.

Jesus' death bridged the gulf between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. He died to pay the penalty of our sin and rescue us "out of the darkness and gloom of Satan's kingdom" and bring us "into the Kingdom of His dear Son, who bought out freedom with His blood and forgave us all our sins." (Colossians 1:13-14) But without His resurrection and ascension, His sacrifice would have been incomplete, and we would have remained under the penalty of death. (I Corinthians 15:17)

To believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world is to believe in a living person. People often ask, "What is the meaning of belief?" *The Amplified New Testament* expresses the full meaning of the term *believe* as "adhere to, trust in, and rely on." The Gospel of John has been called the Gospel of *Belief*. The word *believe* occurs many times in the book of John. Chapter 20, verse 31, expresses the purpose of that book:

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name."

The living Savior, therefore, is the basis for Christian confidence. The resurrection is the foundation of our certainty that we have eternal life and that we experience daily the indwelling presence of our loving Savior.

Christian Certainty

1. What must one do to become a Christian? (John 1:12)
2. To be a son of God is to be born of whom? (John 1:13)
3. To believe in Jesus Christ is to possess and be free from what? (John 5:24)
4. What did Christ do with our sins? How should this affect our lives? (I Peter 2:24-25)
5. What three things characterize Jesus' sheep? (John 10:27)
6. What is your relationship with Christ, as He Himself states in John 10:28-30?

7. What are the implications of failing to believe the testimony that God has given regarding His Son? (I John 5:10-11)

8. The resurrection of Jesus is history's most revolutionary event. How does it prove Christ's claim to be God? (Romans 1:4)

Why is the resurrection so essential to our faith? (I Corinthians 15:17, Ephesians 2:4-10)

New Life

1. In John 3:3-7, what did Jesus tell Nicodemus about seeing and entering the Kingdom of God?

2. At physical birth one receives many things he is not aware of: family name, privileges, wealth, love, care, and protection. At spiritual birth, one becomes a son of God and receives eternal life, a divine inheritance, and God's love, care, and protection. God has given us these because of His great love. God's gifts are never based on man's changing emotions, but on His own unchanging word. In your own words, describe what you have, according to these verses: Ephesians 1:7, Romans 5:1, Romans 3:22, Colossians 1:27.

3. As you begin to live the Christian life, what three evidences in your life will assure you that you know Jesus Christ? (I John 2:3, I John 3:14, Romans 8:16)

Life Application

1. Who is Jesus Christ to you?
2. What is your relationship with God?
3. What kind of life do you now possess?
4. What about your sins?
5. Why are you sure (or doubtful) of your salvation?
6. What changes do you believe have taken place because of Christ in your life?

The Christ-Controlled Life

Bill Bright

There is a throne, a control center -- the intersection of one's intellect, emotions, and will -- in every life. Either self or Christ is on that throne. Let me illustrate.



I like to plan as far in advance as possible, especially for key events. But occasionally I get so busy with the many details of our worldwide ministry that an important item slips through. With a key conference only a couple of weeks away, I had realized the need for a set of printed materials that would be of tremendous benefit to the attendees.

As I shared the urgency with the department director responsible for this need, he responded, "Bill, we're full up already. Two weeks just isn't enough time."

I became impatient. Couldn't my associate see that we are in a war for men's souls, that we must seize opportunities when they arise and not limit our efforts to 8-to-5 workdays? I made my point clear to him.

"But if we had more notice....," he protested. "There just is no way we can squeeze in such a huge job with so little time. There's the writing, then the design, typesetting, and artwork, then the printing..."

It seemed obvious that he did not share my burden for the upcoming event. I pressed my point. "Look, this is an important international conference," I said firmly, my voice rising. "And this is no time for 'business as usual.' Please find a way to finish this project in time for the conference, even if you have to work around the clock."

I could tell that my colleague was frustrated. But I reasoned, *We need those printed materials. Whatever it takes, we need them.*

Within a few moments after our conversation, I sensed the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Yes, even in our well-intended service of the Lord, we can stumble -- and in the name of godliness I had offended a dear brother in Christ. I had failed to give him and his staff the benefit of the doubt -- failed to take into account the tough workload they already were facing each day.

Instead of asking him to think through the possibilities with me and helping him rearrange his priorities to accommodate the new task, I had virtually ordered him to get the project done and shown little appreciation for the many late evenings his team was already devoting to their work. I had reacted impatiently rather than in a spirit of love, understanding, and teamwork.

At this point I had a choice to make.

On the one hand, I could let it go. After all, doesn't the head of a large organization have the right to ramrod projects through when necessary? Didn't the end (the strategic international conference) justify the means (get the job done no matter what it takes)? And didn't my associate's hesitant attitude warrant a stern talking-to about the urgency of the hour?

By all human standards, I probably could have justified letting the incident go. But deep inside I would have been restless and uncomfortable as the Holy Spirit continued to point out my sin to me, and God would not have blessed my efforts on His behalf as long as this sin remained unconfessed. On top of that, several of my dear co-workers would have continued to hurt as a result of my callous attitude.

On the other hand, I could deal with the problem by taking scriptural action to clear the slate. The unrest in my conscience was the Holy Spirit cross-examining me as I tried to rationalize my behavior. What I had thought was forceful leadership, He was identifying as the signs of impatience and unjustifiable anger.

I knew that taking scriptural action was the only choice I could make that would please my Lord. I confessed my sin to Him and appropriated His forgiveness.

Then came the toughest part.

I drove down to the office complex where my associate and his team were located and asked their forgiveness. We cried and laughed and prayed together, sensing a fresh outpouring of God's love in our midst. Then we talked through our mutual needs and found a way -- as teammates -- to rearrange priorities and accomplish the task -- on time!

That is what the Christian life is all about -- just keeping Christ on the throne. You do this when you understand how to walk in the control and power of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit came for the express purpose of glorifying Christ by enabling the believer to live a holy life and to be a fruitful witness for our dear Savior.

Many people have misconceptions about the Christian life. Some argue that once they have received Jesus Christ into their lives by faith, it is up to them to live a life pleasing to God in their own strength. Others believe that Christ has entered their lives to help them live and work for God's glory. These ideas of Christian living look good on the surface, but each contains a weakness that actually undermines the basis of vital Christian living.

In light of Romans 7:18, Galatians 2:20, and Romans 1:17, what do you think the basic approach should be?

Someone said, "The Christian life is not difficult -- it is impossible." Only one person has ever lived the Christian life, and that was Jesus Christ. Today He desires to go on living His life through Christians whom He indwells. J.B. Phillips, in the preface to his translation of a portion of the New Testament, *Letters to Young Churches*, said:

"The great difference between present-day Christianity and that of which we read in these letters is that to us it is primarily a performance, while to them it was a real experience. We are apt to reduce the Christian religion to a code, or at best a rule of heart and life. To those men it is quite plainly the invasion of their lives by a new quality of life altogether. They do not hesitate to describe this as Christ "living" in them.

Before His death, Christ told His disciples that it was best for Him to leave them so that the Spirit of God might come to dwell in each of them (John 14:16-20, 16:7). In other words, Christ was physically departing from His disciples so that He might always be present spiritually within each of them.

Today when a person places his faith in Christ, Christ comes to dwell within him by means of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). His purpose for dwelling in us is that He might live His life through us. Many Christians are trying to operate on their own finite ability instead of Christ's infinite power.

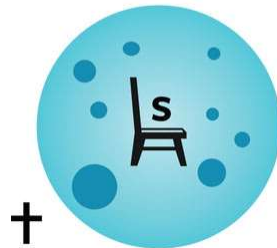
Have you ever asked yourself, *How can I experience the victorious life of Christ?* To find the answer, let's examine the three types of persons in the world today: the non-Christian (natural man), the spiritual Christian, and the worldly or carnal Christian.

The Non-Christian or Natural Man

Why are many Christians not filled with the Holy Spirit?

In the following diagram, this circle represents the life of the person who has never received Christ as Savior and Lord. Christ stands outside the door of the life, seeking entrance. (Revelation 3:20)

Self-Directed Life



- S** Self is on the throne
- +** Christ is outside the life
- Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration

1. What adjective do you think best describes the man who does not understand the things of the Spirit of God? (1 Corinthians 2:14)

2. What terms describe self in the following verses? (Romans 6:6, Galatians 5:16-17)

3. List at least 3 characteristics of the man without Christ, as described in Ephesians 2:1-3.

4. What is the condition of the heart of the natural man? (Jeremiah 17:9)

5. List the thirteen sins that Jesus said come from the heart of man. (Mark 7:20-23)

6. Summarize the relationship between God and the non-Christian. (John 3:36)

7. How, then, does one become a Christian? (John 1:12, Revelation 3:20)

The Spiritual or Christ-Controlled Christian

This circle represents the life of the person who has invited Jesus Christ to come into his life and who is allowing Him to control and empower his life. Christ is occupying His rightful place on the throne of the life. Self has been dethroned.

Christ-Directed Life

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness



- Life is Christ-centered
- Empowered by Holy Spirit
- Introduces others to Christ
- Has effective prayer life
- Understands God's Word
- Trusts God
- Obeys God

1. What are some other characteristics of a life controlled by God's Spirit? (Galatians 5:22-23)

2. In what sense could the Spirit-controlled life be called the exchanged life? (Galatians 2:20)

3. Where does the Christian receive the power to live this otherwise impossible life? (Philippians 4:13)

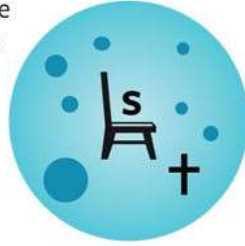
4. What does the spiritual Christian have that will enable him to understand the things of God? (1 Corinthians 2:14-16)

The Worldly Christian and the Solution

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 the Apostle Paul addresses the Christians as "worldly," rather than spiritual. The following diagram represents a life in which the person's ego has asserted itself. Self has usurped the throne of the life, and Christ has stepped down. The result is the loss of the individual's fellowship with God though he is still a Christian.

Self-Directed Life

- Legalistic attitude
- Impure thoughts
- Jealousy
- Guilt
- Worry
- Discouragement
- Critical spirit
- Frustration



- Aimlessness
- Fear
- Ignorance of spiritual heritage
- Unbelief
- Disobedience
- Loss of love for God and others
- Poor prayer life
- No desire for Bible Study

1. Describe the worldly Christian as presented in I Corinthians 3:1-3.

Name five or six practices that result from worldliness. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Summarize in your own words the relationship between the worldly mind and God, as described in Romans 8:7.

2. The solution to worldliness (the self-controlled life) is threefold. We must confess our sins, recognizing that we have been rulers of our own lives. When we confess them, what will God do? (I John 1:9)

Read Proverbs 28:13. What is the result of not admitting sin? Read Proverbs 28:13 again, then read Psalm 32:1. What is the result of admitting your sin?

We must surrender, or yield, the throne to Christ. State in your own words how Paul describes the act of presenting ourselves to God. (Romans 12:1-2)

By faith we must recognize that Christ assumed control of our lives upon our invitation. How can you be sure that if you ask Jesus Christ to assume His rightful place on the throne of your life, He will do it? (1 John 5:14-15)

We receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. How then do we allow Him to control our lives moment by moment? (Colossians 2:6)

Give three reasons faith is so important. (Hebrews 11:6, Romans 14:23, Romans 1:17)

Life Application

The secret of the abundant life is to allow Jesus Christ to control your life moment by moment through His Holy Spirit living within you. When you realize that you have sinned, confess your sin immediately; thank God for forgiving you and continue to walk in fellowship with God.

1. In prayer, examine your attitude. Do you honestly want Christ to control your life? If not, ask God to change your heart. Thank Him, by faith, that He has begun to do so.

List areas of your life that you believe should be brought under the control of Jesus Christ.

Ask God to show you ways to bring these areas under His control

2. To make I John 1:9 meaningful in your life:

- List your sins and failures below.
- Claim I John 1:9 for your own life by writing the words of the verse over the list after you print out this study.
- Thank God for His forgiving and cleansing.
- Destroy the list.
- Make restitution wherever appropriate and possible.

Five Principles of Growth

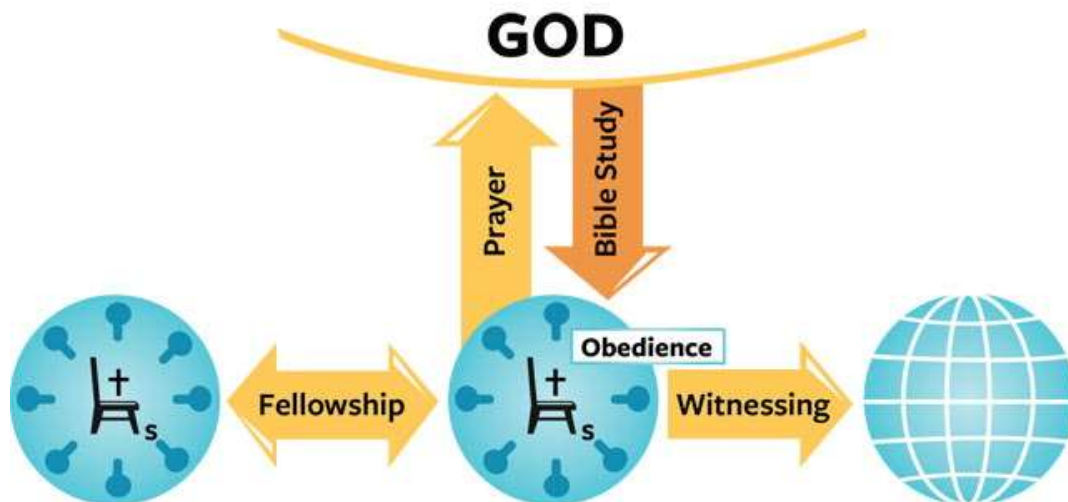
Bill Bright

You made the most important decision of your life when you chose to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. At that moment you were born into God's family, and you received everything you need to live the abundant Christian life.

But that does not mean you are as spiritually mature as someone who has walked with Christ for many years. The Christian life is a process that begins with an act of faith and is lived by faith.

What do you suppose would happen to a child who doesn't grow properly in his physical body? In his emotional life? In his spiritual maturity? Just as physical life requires air, food, rest, and exercise, so does spiritual life require certain things for growth and development.

This lesson deals with five principles of Christian growth. The first two, *We Must Study God's Word*, and *We Must Pray*, help us deepen our relationship with God. This could be called our vertical relationship. Through the Bible, God communicates to us; through prayer, we communicate with Him.



The next two principles, *We Must Fellowship with other Christians*, and *We must Witness for Christ*, help us reach out to others. This could be called our horizontal relationship. In fellowship, we communicate with other Christians about our Savior and the bond He gives us with one another. In witnessing, we communicate with non-Christians. We tell them about Jesus, what He has done for us, and what He desires to do for them.

Principle Five, *We Must Obey God*, is the core of growth. As we obey Him, we experience increasing joy, peace, and fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and fellow believers. We also become increasingly more mature in our Christian walk.

If you follow these principles, you can be sure that you will grow toward maturity in Christ.

Principle One - We Must Study God's Word

Read James 1:18-27

You would not think of going without physical food for a week or even a day, would you? It is necessary for physical life. Without food, we become weakened and eventually may become ill. Lack of spiritual food produces the same results in our spiritual lives.

1. What is the food of the young Christian? (I Peter 2:2)

In what ways have you made it a consistent spiritual diet?

Read Psalm 119. Write down several ways God's Word can help you in your daily life.

2. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." How did He say we should live and be nourished? (Matthew 4:4) Have you applied this to your life? Describe how it nourishes your spiritual life.
3. List the two characteristics of the workman God approves, according to II Timothy 2:15. What steps have you taken to make these characteristics true in your life?

4. What did Jesus say about those who read and believe God's Word? (John 8:31-32) What does this mean to your way of life?
5. When does the man who is spiritually mature meditate on the Word of God? (Psalm 1:2-3) How can you do this in our hectic, pull-apart world?
6. In what specific ways do you expect God's Word to affect you?

Principle Two - We Must Pray

Read Matthew 26:31-75

Have you ever considered that you have immediate access to the most powerful Person in the universe? Whatever you need, whatever the time, you can call upon Him. His calendar is cleared to be with you. His schedule is open for your appointment; His full attention is devoted to you.

Prayer is the inspiring experience of conversing with, and praising God as our loving, heavenly Father. Few experiences can equal prayer in empowering us and lifting us above our problems. But prayer is not just an "escape hatch" for us to get out of trouble, please ourselves, or gain our selfish ends. Rather, it is inviting Him to talk to us as we talk to Him. There is more to prayer, but this is basic to true prayer. Study the above passage and answer the following questions:

1. What was Jesus' command in Matthew 26:41 and why did He command it?
2. Why did Peter fail to resist temptation?

1. As God's children, what should we not neglect? (Hebrews 10:23-25)

2. According to the above verses, what should we do for one another? In what ways have you done them recently, and for who?

3. The new believers in Acts 2:42 continued steadfastly in what four things? Why is each one so vital to spiritual growth?

4. In what ways do you profit from Christian fellowship? Be specific.

5. Answer the following questions below:

Why is it important that a Christian be part of a small group with other Christians sharing the Word of God?

Why is it necessary to work out conflicts with members of your Christian circle? What can happen if you don't?

What steps can you take to resolve conflict with others? (1 Peter 3:8-11)

Principle Four - We Must Witness for Christ

Read Acts 26:12-29

A witness is a person who tells what he has seen and heard. He shares his own personal experience. Anyone who has a vital personal relationship with Christ can be a witness for Him. Witnessing is the overflow of the Christian life. A vital Christian life is contagious. As our lives are filled with the presence of the Lord Jesus, we cannot help but share Him with those with whom we come into contact.

1. In Romans 1:14-16, Paul tells us his own attitude about sharing the Gospel with others. Using his three "I am's" as the keys to the passage, describe his attitude in your own words.
2. Compare your own attitude concerning witnessing with Paul's. (Colossians 1:28)
3. What did Peter tell us in I Peter 3:15 that we should always be ready to do? Where and when can you do this?
4. What was Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8. How is this promise shown in your life today?
5. Name at least three people to whom you are impressed to witness to in the power of Christ. Prayerfully ask God to show you ways to share your faith in Christ with each one.

It is the privilege and responsibility of every Christian to reach his world with the message of Christ.

Principle Five - We Must Obey God

Read Romans 6:14-23

The key to rapid growth in the Christian life is obedience to the will of God. Knowing the principles of growth is of no value unless we actually apply them to our lives. To be disobedient to the one who loves us and who alone knows what is really best for us would be sheer folly. Remember, He is even more desirous than you are that you have an abundant life.

1. What did Christ teach concerning the possibility of serving more than one master? (Matthew 6:24)
2. How much should you love the Lord? (Matthew 22:37)
3. How can you prove you love Him? (John 14:21) How have you done this today? This week?
4. What will be the result of keeping Christ's commandments? (John 15:10-11)
5. Where do we get the power to obey God? (Philippians 2:13) What happens if we try to obey God's commands in our own efforts?
6. In light of Luke 6:46-49, why do you think obedience to Christ is imperative for your life?

Life Application

List the five key principles of Christian growth, a key verse relating to each one, why it is essential to spiritual maturity, and at least one way you can apply each principle to your own life.

The Christian's Authority

Bill Bright

Before I became a believer in Jesus Christ, God's Word did not make sense to me. I occasionally tried to read it during my high school and college days, but found it boring. Finally, I concluded that no really intelligent person could believe the Bible.

Then I became a Christian.

My life was transformed, and my attitude concerning the scriptures changed. I realized the Bible was the holy, inspired, and eternally authoritative Word of God.

Not only is God's Word divinely inspired, but it is also the basis of our belief as Christians. It gives us God's perspective on how we should live and how we can be fruitful witnesses for our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible is God's love letter to man. From Genesis to Revelation, it tells of God's great compassion for us and of His desire to fellowship with us. Furthermore, the Bible reveals God's attributes. It tells us that He is holy, sovereign, righteous and just; that He is loving, merciful and kind; that He is gracious, patient and faithful; that He is powerful, wise, and constantly available to His children.

And the more we read and meditate upon His precious Word - and allow His Holy Spirit to control our lives - the more fruitful we become for our Lord. Because God's Word is truth and "sharper than any two-edged sword," it is impregnated with the power of the Holy Spirit to speak to today's world and our own personal needs and circumstances.

Ultimately our view of the authority of the Bible and of the incarnation of Christ are related. In John 10:34-36, for example, Jesus taught that the Old Testament was totally accurate. In Matthew 4:4-10, He quoted it as being authoritative (Matthew 24:35).

He even told us that the Holy Spirit would bring to mind what He said so that the disciples would preach and write accurately, not depending upon only memory or human understanding (John 16:12-15).

A high view of inspiration should be related to personal Bible study and meditation. As you study this lesson, I urge you to apply the principles that you will learn about God's inspired Word to your life. Let God speak to you and invite the Holy Spirit to transform you into a joyful and fruitful Christian.

Biblical Claims of Authority

1. What were the attitudes of the following prophets concerning their writings? Isaiah 43:1-12, Jeremiah 23:1-8, Ezekiel 36:32-38.
2. What were the attitudes of the following authors toward other writers of scripture? Paul (Romans 3:1-2), Peter (II Peter 1:19-21), the writer of Hebrews 1:1.
3. If the writers had this high regard for scripture, how should we view the Bible? What part should God's Word have in our lives and in the way we evaluate and react to circumstances and events?

Purpose of Personal Bible Study

1. Name some of the practical results of a thorough study of the Word of God. (II Timothy 3:15-17) What changes have you seen in your life from your study of the Bible?
2. In Acts 20:32, Paul says that the Word of God is able to do what two things?
3. What should be the effect of reading the Word of God on your own life? (James 1:22-25)

Think of a difficult circumstance in your life. In what ways is reading and meditating on God's Word helping you cope with the situation? How are you applying God's Word to the problem?

Preparations for Personal Bible Study

1. Set aside a definite time. When did Moses meet with God? (Exodus 34:2-4) When Did Christ meet with God? (Mark 1:35) What is the best time for you?
2. Find a definite place. Where did Christ pray? (Mark 1:35) What is the value of being alone?
3. Employ these tools: Modern translation of the Bible, notebook, pen, dictionary. How can you use these tools in your Bible study?

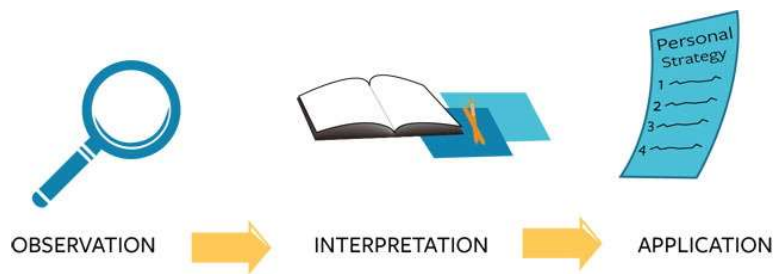
Preparation for Personal Bible Study

Using Psalm 119:57-64, go through these three major steps of methodical Bible study:

1. Observation: What does the passage say? Read quickly for content. Read again carefully, noting key words and phrases.
2. Interpretation: What does the passage mean? Ask God to give you understanding of the passage. Consult a dictionary or modern translation for the for the precise meaning of the words.

Ask: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

3. Application: Ask yourself, "What does the passage mean to me and how can I apply it to my life?"



Make a list of the following:

- Attitudes to be changed
- Actions to take or avoid
- Promises to claim
- Sins to confess and forsake
- Examples to follow
- Other personal applications

Life Application

Study Luke 19:1-10, and apply the Bible study method you just learned.

What does the passage say?

What does it mean?

How does it apply to you?

How effective will this method of Bible study be for you now with other scripture passages?

1. What changes in your life do you expect as you proceed with more in-depth Bible study?
2. Plan your Bible study time for the next four weeks. Write down the time, the place, and the passages to be studied.

Learning to Pray

Bill Bright

Communication is a vital element in any successful relationship, including our relationship with God. He wants us to communicate with Him about our cares and concerns. He desires that we talk to Him about every area of our lives. This communication with God is called prayer.

Prayer is much more than words. It is an expression of the heart toward God. It is an experience, a relationship - not an activity. As a child of God, you are invited to come boldly before His throne. In Hebrews 4:14-16, the writer records:

"Since we have a great High Priest who has gone through the Heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us...then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need."

Because the one to whom you pray is the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, you come into His presence with reverence. But He is also your loving, heavenly Father who cares for you. Therefore, you can enter into His presence with a relaxed, joyful heart, knowing that God loves you more than anyone else has ever loved you or will love you.

What Is Prayer?

Since prayer is communication between two persons, it can also be described as a dialogue. Write a sentence about the part each of these have in a dialogue between the believer and God.

1. Prayer is the privilege of believers. (John 3:22-23)

2. We relate to God like children to a father. (Ephesians 2:4,5,8; I Peter 5:7)

3. God wants to hear what we say. (Psalms 62:8, 65:2, Proverbs 15:8)

4. God delights in and longs for our fellowship. (Psalm 27:8, John 4:23, Proverbs 15:8)
5. We can talk to God about anything. (Matthew 7:7, John 16:24)
6. Prayer can keep us from sin. (Matthew 26:41)

How to Pray

1. What part does the Holy Spirit play in prayer? (Romans 8:26-27)
2. What do these verses teach us about how to pray? (Psalm 145:18, Matthew 6:5-7, 21:22, Philippians 4:6)
3. What vital elements of prayer are found in Acts 4:24-30?
4. What are some of the promises Christ makes to you when you pray? (Matthew 6:6, 18:20, Luke 11:9-13, John 14:13-14)

The Importance of the Church

Bill Bright

A mother once asked her child if he knew what a church was. With a big smile on his face, he said, "Yes mommy. That's where God lives."

Of course, the child's perception that God lives in a single, physical place is incorrect. Nevertheless, his statement is profound: God does live in His church - the company of all who believe in Jesus Christ and have received Him as their Savior and Lord.

In a broad biblical sense, the church is the body of Christ - the collection of Christian believers from all over the world and from all times who are bound together by the shed blood of Christ and His resurrected presence.

In our local congregations, we play an important part of the body of Christ. God wants us to work together so that the church body can minister to others more effectively.

The church also is a unity of the Holy Spirit. Although doctrinal differences often separate Christian groups, they are united in the fact that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross, and He rose from the dead that through Him we can be reconciled to God.

The outreach of the church is worldwide. When our Lord's earthly ministry was completed, He commanded the church to carry His good news to the world. By sharing our faith in Christ, we are helping to fulfill His Great Commission.

I am convinced that a proper understanding of the church and how it is to function as a local body is important if we are to be fruitful disciples for Christ.

Some time ago I struck up a conversation with the passenger sitting next to me on a plane flight. As we talked, he was very cordial and pleasant. Then I asked, "Where are you on your spiritual journey?" Suddenly, he became defensive.

"I had my fill of the church when I was a young boy. Can you believe that I was forced to attend services at least three times a week? Every Sunday morning and evening and every Wednesday night. Years ago, I determined that when I became an adult, I would never attend church again as long as I live."

"How would you like to live in a community where there was no church?" I asked. He dropped his head and was silent for a moment. Then he replied, "I wouldn't like that."

Looking at him firmly in the eye, I said forcefully, "You are a parasite!" Immediately he became flustered and said impatiently, "What do you mean by that?"

"Simple. You want all the benefits of the church without any of the responsibility." He slowly smiled, returned my direct gaze, then announced, "For the first time in 20 years, I'll be in church on Sunday."

Before I became a Christian, I used to believe that the church was filled with hypocrites. Now I recognize that many people go to church - not because they are perfect - but because they need help. The church then, in the vernacular of the business world, is a repair shop, not a retail store. The church is not perfect, but it is the institution that offers hope and healing in any community or culture. It is how God reaches out to others with His love and forgiveness.

I urge you to study this lesson prayerfully and carefully. As you continue in your study of the Bible, search out passages that describe the church and its ministry on earth. Keep a diary of your studies for future reference.

Composition of the Church

1. What did the early Christians do that we should do also? (Acts 2:41-42, 4:31, 5:41-42, 8:4) List several ways you can apply these to your Christian walk.
2. As God's children, how do we obey the instructions given in Hebrews 10:25?
3. Read I Thessalonians 1:1-10 then list here some qualities God desires in members of any church.
4. In what ways do you demonstrate these qualities?

Ordinances of the Church

1. What do you believe baptism accomplishes? (Matthew 28:19) Who is eligible for baptism? What was the significance of your baptism?
2. What is the meaning of the communion service? (I Corinthians 11:23-26)
3. How do you prepare yourself to observe the Lord's supper?

Purposes of the Church

1. What should be one of the basic purposes of a church? (II Timothy 4:2) How does the church you attend fulfill these purposes in this verse?
2. List several of your own reasons for joining a church.
3. What should the church believe about Christ's birth? (Mathew 1:23), Deity (John 1:14), Death (I Peter 2:24), Resurrection (I Corinthians 15:3-4), Second Coming (I Thessalonians 4:16-17)?

Where does your church stand on these truths? It may be helpful to obtain a doctrinal statement from your church and research these areas.

1. What abilities does God give (besides that of serving as a prophet or apostle) to strengthen the church members? (Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10)

Which of these roles do you fill? Which would you like to be involved in? Why? How are you preparing yourself for that ministry?

Life Application

1. If you are not already active in a local church, prayerfully list two or three that you will visit in the next month, with the purpose of attending one regularly. Before you attend the first service, list the qualities you feel are essential for spiritual growth and fellowship. Ask God to show you which church He is leading you to join.
2. If you are part of a local church, ask God to show you ways you can be more used by Him in the church. List the ways of service that He reveals to you.
3. The following are suggestions for making your church worship more meaningful:
 - Bow for silent prayer before the service begins. Pray for yourself, for the minister, for those taking part in the service and for those worshiping, that Christ will be very real to all, and that those who do not know Christ may come to know Him.
 - Always take your Bible. Underline portions that are made especially meaningful by the sermons.
 - Take notes on the sermon and apply them to your life.
 - Can you list some other ways?