

LIFECHANGE

Beginning Your Spiritual Growth Journey



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
MOUNT STERLING

GROWING UNIVERSITY

A DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY OF FBC MOUNT STERLING

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A Letter from Pastor Chris

Dear Friend,

Congratulations! You have made the most important commitment a person can ever make! Accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior impacts your life now and for eternity. The life-change that you have experienced is what the Bible calls a new birth. When you were physically born, you came into the world as a baby and then grew into maturity. The same is true of your spiritual birth, you need to grow into spiritual maturity. It is our desire, as your church family, to assist you in growing spiritually.

This handbook will help you get started on your spiritual growth journey. During the first seven days we will give you a brief introduction to seven beginning steps for new believers. It is important to follow through on all of these devotionals as they will give you a strong biblical foundation for your faith journey. I have discovered through many years of following Christ that wherever there is divine operation there will be demonic opposition. In other words, whenever God works in our hearts and we respond in obedience (i.e. divine operation) we are going to face obstacles and challenges that will attempt to stop us from growing in our faith (i.e. demonic opposition). Your salvation is secure in Christ and has been sealed by the Holy Spirit. However, Satan does not want you to mature in your faith and continue the mission in which Jesus has entrusted to His followers.

Please know that you have been prayed for! We know that you will need help as you begin living your life for Christ. God has given you a spiritual family to help you mature in your faith. The church is not *like* a family, the church *is* a family; and we're here for you!

Celebrating your decision!



Pastor Chris

P.S.

Before jumping into the handbook, here are a couple of things you may want to do...

1. Have you signed up for baptism?
2. Have you completed CLASS 101?

You can call the church offices at 859.498.5645 to sign up for baptism and CLASS 101.

Introduction

As you begin to work through this week of devotions, let me encourage you to write down questions you might discover along the way. When I first became a Christian I was embarrassed that I couldn't find Scripture passages as fast as others. There is no reason to feel like you should have your Bible's Table of Contents (ToC) memorized. The ToC is there for a reason... use it!

Here is a quick crash course in Scripture references...

The Bible consists of 66 different books. Those books are grouped into two major divisions: The Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books). The ultimate connection between the Testaments is that the Old Testament is a prediction of Jesus Christ and the New Testament is the fulfillment through Jesus Christ. When we reference a particular verse of the Bible we list the name of the book followed by a set of two numbers. For example: John 3:16. Using our Table of Contents we notice there are several books named John (i.e. John, 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John). We discover the "John" in our example is referring to the Gospel According to John in the New Testament. The "3" refers to the chapter and the "16" refers to the verse.

Here are a few other considerations as you prepare to work through this handbook...

1. Get a Bible to use with this handbook. There are various translations of the Bible. These translations are not different Bibles, the translators are simply trying to translate the original languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) into English in the most understandable way. Some translators focus on a word-for-word translation and others focus on a thought-for-thought translation. The KJV, NKJV, and ESV are all examples of word-for-word translations. The NIV, NLT, and CEV are examples of thought-for-thought translations. I often use both the NKJV and NLT in helping me understand what the Bible passage is saying. NOTE: It is best to memorize from a word-for-word translation.
2. Get a pen or pencil for taking notes and answering the questions. Write down your own questions for further study and discussion in your small group.
3. In part, the purpose of this 7-day study is to help you discover truths from God's word (The Bible). As you read each question, turn to the Scripture reference in your personal Bible and search for the answer.
4. As you read God's word in search of the answers, keep in mind that there are no "trick questions." The questions are intended to be direct and the answers will be found directly from Scripture. The primary purpose of this personal learning tool is to encourage your personal walk with Christ and to help you mature in your faith.

Step 1: Assurance of Your Salvation

God wants you to have confidence that your salvation is secure. As you already know, salvation is a gift that you cannot earn. Our understanding of the security of your salvation is not based upon feelings, but based upon the facts discovered from God's word.

1. **Your Assurance Is Based on the Word of God.** The Bible makes it clear in John 3:16 as well as 1 John 5:11-13 that God wants you to know that you have eternal life. Take a moment and read these two Bible verses and highlight/underline them in your Bible.
2. **Your Assurance is Based on the Promises of God.** In the space provided below, read Romans 10:9 and John 5:24 and then write down the promises found in these verses.

Romans 10:9 _____
John 5:24 _____

3. **Your Assurance Is Based on the Character of God.** A promise is only as reliable as the person who makes it. That is why the assurance of your salvation rests on God's character. What do these verses teach about God's character?

1 Corinthians 1:9 _____
1 Thessalonians 5:24 _____
Hebrews 10:23 _____

The Bible teaches that God is faithful (reliable, steadfast, trustworthy, and stable). You can believe the promises because you know the Promisor. God, your loving Father, is absolutely faithful. Nothing will change His mind about your salvation. Nothing will separate you from His love. Your relationship to God through Jesus Christ is secure.

What does God's word say about the security of your salvation? Read Romans 8:38-39. Can any circumstance separate you from God?

4. **Your Assurance Is Based on the Spirit of God.** To further assure you of your salvation, God has sent living, daily proof of your relationship. As an official seal is placed on a contract between two individuals to guarantee the contract's validity, so God has given a seal (guarantee) of His promise to you.

Read Ephesians 1:13-13. What is the seal given by God as a guarantee of His promise? _____

The Holy Spirit at work within you is indisputable proof of your salvation. The Holy Spirit's work in your life will bring changes. Some changes will be gradual; some will be instant. The inward and outward changes that result are evidence of your salvation.

Step 1 Review

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- What changes have you seen in your life since you committed it to Jesus Christ?

- Don't forget that your assurance is based on:
 1. The _____ of God.
 2. The _____ of God.
 3. The _____ of God.
 4. The _____ of God.

Congratulations! You have completed the first devotional.

Step 2: Publicly Declare Your Faith

After you make a commitment to trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior, it is important for you to take the first step of obedience to Christ and follow Him in baptism.

1. **Why Should I Be Baptized?** A test of whether a person is a true follower of Jesus Christ is his or her obedience to Jesus' commands.
 - A. **To follow the example set by Christ.** (Read the account of Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13-17).
 - B. **Because Christ commanded it.** (Read Matthew 28:19-20.) Baptism is not a suggestion or an option for His followers. If we are not baptized, we are disobedient.
 - C. **It is a public testimony of your faith in Christ.** (Read Matthew 10:32.) Therefore, baptism is an act of obedience that publicly declares one's faith.

2. **What is the Meaning of Baptism?** Baptism is a picture of two things: what Jesus did for you and what has happened to you.
 - A. **Baptism illustrates Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.** (Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
 - B. **Baptism illustrates my death to sin, the burial of my old self, as well as my new life as a Christian** (Read Romans 6:4.) Remember that baptism doesn't make you a Believer; it demonstrates that you already believe. It's important to understand that baptism does not save you. You are saved only by grace through faith in Jesus. (Read Ephesians 2:8-9)

3. **Why Be Baptized By Immersion?**
 - A. **Because Jesus was baptized that way.** (Read Matthew 3:13-17).
 - B. **Because every baptism in the Bible was by immersion.**
 - C. **Because the word "baptize" actually means "to dip under water."** The Greek word "baptizo" means "to fully immerse or dip under water."
 - D. **Because immersion best symbolizes a burial and resurrection!**

4. **Who Should Be Baptized?** Every person who has believed in Christ. (Read Acts 2:41)

5. **When Should I Be Baptized?** As soon as you have believed!

There is no reason to delay. As soon as you have decided to receive Christ into your life, you can and should be baptized at your earliest opportunity. If you wait until you are “perfect” you’ll never be ready.

If you have not been baptized, you can sign up by calling the church offices at 859.498.5645.

Step 2 Review

- Based on what you just read, fill in the blanks...
 1. Baptism is a public _____ of your faith in Christ.
 2. Baptism is a picture of Jesus’ death, _____, and resurrection.
 3. Baptism is a picture of my death to sin, the burial of my old self, as well as my _____ as a Christian.
 4. The word “baptize” actually means “to _____ water.”
 5. Every person who has _____ should be baptized.

Fantastic! You’ve completed the second devotional.

Step 3: Join a Small Group

You were not created to live life in isolation from others. God has created you to live in community with other believers. Joining a Small Group is a crucial step for your continued spiritual growth. God has placed individuals in families for their care, protection, encouragement, and development. You need your church family for the same reasons (and many more). Consider these biblical reasons for joining a small group.

1. **You need healthy Christian relationships for care and support.**

Take a moment and read Ecclesiastes 4:9-10. What is one of the benefits of being in a small group according to God's word?

2. **You need healthy Christian relationships for encouragement.**

Take a moment and read Hebrews 10:24-25. Why do you need the fellowship of a small group?

3. **You need healthy Christian relationships for instruction.**

Take a moment and read Ephesians 4:1-16. What is the role of leaders in the church (v.12)? What is the role of all believers (saints v.12)? What is the result when everyone works together (v.16)?

Step 3 Review

- Why do you believe it is important for you to join a small group?

- Have you joined a small group? If so, write down a snapshot of your group...

1. Leader(s)? _____
2. When? _____
3. Where _____

- Spend some time in prayer for those in your small group.
- As much as you need your small group, your small group needs you! If you have not joined a small group, contact the church offices and we can help you find the right group!

You're doing great! You've completed the third devotional.

Step 4: Develop Spiritual Disciplines

We will explain Spiritual HABITS in greater detail during CLASS 102. In the meantime, it is important to know that developing spiritual disciplines is an important part of your faith journey. Here are six spiritual disciplines that we encourage every believer to develop...

- Hang Time with God (Daily Bible Reading & Prayer)
- Accountability in a Small Group
- Bible Memorization
- Involvement in the Ministry & Mission of the Church
- Tithing/Stewardship Commitment
- Sermon Notes

It is important for new believers to begin immediately developing the discipline of daily Bible reading and prayer. Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and then reach each of the following benefits of reading God’s Word.

1. **God’s Word is useful for doctrine.** Reading God’s word can teach us about our faith.

Take a moment and read Jeremiah 31:3. What does this passage teach you about God?

Take a moment and read Romans 5:8. What does this passage teach you about God?

2. **God’s Word is useful for reproof/rebuking.** Reading God’s word can point out a fault and the Holy Spirit brings conviction.

Take a moment and read Ephesians 4:26-31. What are some areas in this passage that God’s word gives us guidance?

3. **God’s Word is useful for correction.** The Bible doesn’t just point out what we are doing wrong, but gives us guidance for living life God’s way.

Write out the answer to the question that is presented in Psalm 119:9.

4. **God's Word is useful for instruction in righteousness.** Reading God's word is spiritual food for your soul. Just as your physical body requires nutrients from the food you eat, your spiritual life requires the daily reading nutrients of God's word.
- Take a moment and read Jeremiah 15:16. What do you think is meant by this passage?

Step 4 Review

- What are the six Spiritual HABITS?

H _____
A _____
B _____
I _____
T _____
S _____

- What are the four benefits of reading God's word?

1. God's word is useful for _____.
2. God's word is useful for _____.
3. God's word is useful for _____.
4. God's word is useful for _____.

Keep up the great work! You've completed the fourth devotional.

Step 5: Become Others Focused

The Christian faith is not a self-centered faith. As we become more like Christ, our concern for others should increase. One of the ways that we express our love for one another is through serving on ministry teams.

The Bible teaches that every believer has a role to serve within the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). What God made me to be determines what He intends for me to do. God is consistent in His plan for each of our lives. He would not give us spiritual gifts, passions, talents, temperaments, and all sorts of experiences and then not want to use them for His glory! We will explore these five personal factors in detail during CLASS 103.

A huge indication of spiritual maturity is when you take off the bib and you put on the apron. Instead of saying things like, “I’m not being fed” the mature believer says, “What am I doing to feed others?” Here are three key truths as to why we should serve the needs of others:

1. **Serving the needs of others reflects the mind of Christ.**

Read Philippians 2:1-5. How can you begin to put the needs of others ahead of your own?

2. **Serving the needs of others produces increased fruitfulness.**

Read 2 Peter 1:5-9. What are some of the characteristics that produce a fruitful walk with Christ?

3. **Serving the needs of others is a testimony of Jesus’ love for others.**

Read John 13:34-35. What is the identifier of a true disciple according to this passage?

Step 5 Review

- What are some of the ways that you can begin to focus on others...

...at home? _____

...at work/school? _____

...in my neighborhood? _____

- Fill in the blanks: "A huge indication of spiritual maturity is when you take off the _____ and you put on the _____." Write down in your own words what this phrase means...

You're almost there! You've completed the fifth devotional.

Step 6: Share Jesus with Others

People love to share good news. We announce marriages and births. When something good happens, we rush to tell someone. The more exciting the news, the harder it is to be silent.

A Christian has the most exciting news – the life-changing news of eternal life! It is natural for a Christian to want to share this good news. Think for a moment about the various people God used to bring you to the place where you were willing to receive Jesus.

Now God wants you to be part of helping others come to know Jesus.

When Andrew met Jesus, his first inclination was to bring _____ to meet Him (read John 1:40-42).

For a Christian, witnessing is not an option. Jesus commanded His followers to witness.

There are two tools you should use when sharing Jesus:

- Scripture
- Your Personal Testimony

1. **Scripture**

The following verses will help you explain to unbelievers the good news of eternal life. Take time now to read them and underline/highlight them in your Bible. It would be good to memorize them too!

- Romans 15:13
- Romans 1:16
- Romans 2:4
- Romans 3:23
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 6:23
- Romans 10:9-13

2. **Your Personal Testimony**

- A. **Salvation Testimony:** Your salvation testimony shares (1) your life before receiving Jesus, (2) how you received Jesus, and (3) how Jesus is making a difference in your life now.
- B. **Growth Testimony:** You will have many growth testimonies as you mature in your faith. Your growth testimonies share (1) an issue or question you've been struggling with, (2) the lesson you learned about the issue/question from studying Scripture, and (3) how you have responded to God's word in light of what you learned.

Take some time to write out your personal salvation testimony. Make sure you include all three parts: life before receiving Jesus, how you received Jesus, and how Jesus is working in your life now.

We cover these testimonies in more detail in CLASS 104. You can also pick up the resource called "Everyone Has a Story," available in the church's Resource Center. Until then, you can begin to share Jesus by simply inviting others to attend worship services with you.

Step 6 Review

- Why should you share Jesus with others?

- Whom do you know who needs to receive Jesus?

- Share your testimony with someone this week.

You're almost finished! You've completed the sixth devotional.

Step 7: Trust Jesus Daily

The Christian faith is more than fire insurance to save you from hell. It is a daily walk with our Creator and living a fulfilled life as God intended.

As you mature in your faith, you will discover more and more what it means to “surrender your life to Christ” and “live for Him.”

1. **Jesus Christ has earned the right to give you direction.**

[Jesus] “... humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the _____. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of _____ every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that _____ is _____, to the glory of God the Father” Philippians 2:5-8.

Paul (the author of the book of Philippians), understood that Jesus was worthy to direct his life.

Paul also challenged believers to do what in Romans 12:1-2?

2. **Jesus Christ desires to give you direction.**

Many people want to know God’s will and He desires to reveal it daily through time spent with Him. His direction can be experienced on a daily basis as you:

- A. Recognize daily His right to direct you life (read Luke 9:23).
- B. Confess your sins and accept His promise of forgiveness (read 1 John 1:9).
- C. Trust Him completely as you allow Him to direct you:
 - Time (read Ephesians 5:15-16)
 - Money (read 1 Corinthians 16:2)
 - Abilities (read Colossians 3:17)
 - Relationships (read Matthew 22:34-40)
 - Mind (read Romans 12:1-2)
 - Ambitions (read Matthew 6:33)
 - Morality (read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Step 7 Review

- What areas in your life need to be placed under the direction of Jesus?
Don't delay. I always told my son, "Delayed obedience is disobedience."
 - ✓ Time: _____
 - ✓ Money: _____
 - ✓ Relationships: _____
 - ✓ Mind: _____
 - ✓ Ambitions: _____
 - ✓ Morality: _____

Congratulations! Now that you have completed the seven beginning steps, you are ready to continue to develop them more fully.

Your next steps...

Complete

- CLASS 101
- CLASS 102
- CLASS 103
- CLASS 104