
I HAVE DECIDED

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person.
The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"

2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT

DEAR FRIEND,

I want to congratulate you on the great and life-changing decision you have made to follow Jesus! Jesus tells us in Luke 15:7 that *“there will be a glorious celebration in heaven over the rescue of one lost sinner who repents, comes back home, and returns to the fold.”* The most important decision any person will make is deciding who they will follow. Who you follow determines where you go in this life, and the next life. There is no greater life than the one lived following Jesus!

Christianity often gets boring and stale for anyone who believes in Jesus but stops following him. We like to say, “When you believe in Jesus you go to heaven, but when you follow Jesus, heaven comes to you.” We don’t have to wait to see God’s miraculous movement in our lives until we get to heaven; we can experience it now. This booklet will help you learn how to get started in following Jesus. We pray you experience God and see heaven come to earth in your life, your family, and your community.

If you would like someone to talk with you about your decision to follow Jesus, you can email us at amen@captivatesd.com and someone from our team will be excited to follow up with you. Again, congratulations, and know we are here for you, cheering you on.

God Bless,

Weston Stutz
Lead Pastor
Captive Church

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LET'S START BY UNPACKING THE STORY OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

Creation

And so it was, that God made a decision to create us. The Bible tells us in Genesis 1:26 that God the Father called a family meeting with the Son and the Spirit and proposed to them, "Let's make man, and let's make them like us." If you have ever wondered, "What is God like?" Or "What does God look like?", the answer is, "like us." From the very beginning, God's intention for us was to live a full and satisfying life in perfect harmony with Him. (*Genesis 1:26-31, Psalm 139:14, Jeremiah 1:5, Ephesians 2:10*)

The Fall

God made people, not robots. He always wanted a two-way relationship with us, one in which we would have the choice to love and follow him or not. Because love is not love without choice, God gave Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, the option to obey him as their God, or to walk away. And like many of us today, the allure of what the world was offering became too great for them to ignore. They disobeyed God and thus ushered sin into the world; creating a rift between God and man. Our perfect union was broken. (*Genesis 3:1-7, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Galatians 5:19-21*)

Our Rejection / His Pursuit

Throughout the Old Testament we see a trend: Man continues to run away from God, and yet God continues to run toward man. No matter how far gone, how disobedient, or how disappointing we became, God never turned His back on us. It was as if He was incapable of letting us go. His plan was and has always been to restore the perfect harmony with us that was lost. And because of that, we know the following to be true: We are more broken than we would ever care to admit, but more loved by our God than we could ever imagine. Although we run from God's love, he never stops offering it. (*Psalm 139:7-8, Isaiah 43:18-19, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 1 John 1:9, 1 Peter 2:9*)

GOD AND HIS PEOPLE (CONT.)

Love Came Down

It became apparent to God that we were not going to be able to live without struggling with sin. So like us, he had to make a decision. Was he to wait until our level of love and obedience to him would elevate us to heaven where he is? Or, would he come down and live like us to reach us where we are. The truth is, we would never be able to make it heaven or earn eternal life on our own merit. Knowing this, Jesus spoke up and said, "I'll go. If they can't get up here, I'll go down there." And thus God sent his one and only son Jesus Christ to come down, to live like us, to love us, and to save us. Jesus came down from heaven to live a sinless life, full of the Holy Spirit, to die in our place, to take away the penalty for our sin, and to raise up three days later, defeating death, hell, and the grave. Jesus left an extraordinary life in heaven, for an ordinary life on earth, so that we could know the extraordinary love of our Heavenly Father. When freedom was out of our reach, it came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. (*John 1:1-3;14, Romans 8:38-39, Romans 10:9;13, Philippians 2:5-8*)

Salvation

You don't have to be perfect. Through Jesus' death on the cross, and His rising from the dead, Jesus took all of your wrong and gave you all of His right. If you believe that and commit to following Him, your life will never be the same. It's as simple as **repenting** of your sin, **declaring** you want to follow Jesus, and **believing** He is who He says He is. (*2 Corinthians 5:21, John 5:24, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:8-9*)

Following

Once again, the most important decision any person will make is deciding who they will follow. Who you follow determines where you go in this life, and the next life. There is no greater life than the one lived following Jesus! Christianity often gets boring and stale for anyone who believes in Jesus but stops following him. We like to say, "When you believe in Jesus you go to heaven, but when you follow Jesus, heaven comes to you." Now let's practice following.



ESSENTIALS

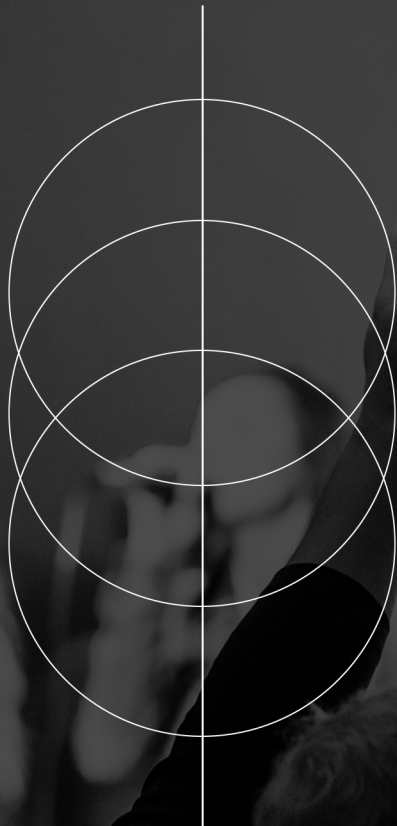
We believe there are 7 essentials in following Jesus. We encourage you to work through this content at your own pace. We recommend you do it with another person.

You got this!



ESSENTIAL #1

PRAYER & WORSHIP



ESSENTIAL #1

WORSHIP & PRAYER

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV

The Christian life is not just about knowing and doing, but also about just being with Jesus. He did not die for us to become his employees, but his family. Before we jump into any practices or habits, we need to realize that following Jesus begins by simply spending time with Jesus.

“Well how much time do I need to spend with Jesus to follow him?”

The answer to that question cannot be reduced to a rule or guideline. Imagine a new husband asking the same question as he’s figuring out what it means to love his new wife. *“Well how much time do I need to spend with her for her to know I love her already?”* Not only is that a funny and awkward question, but the answer would vary depending on the relationship. The answer is, *“however much time it takes to be close, intimate, and connected.”*

Q: How much time do you suppose it would take for you to feel close to God on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis?

“But what would we do together?”

PRAYER

Contrary to popular belief, prayer is not talking to God, it's talking with God. God is excited about hearing us ask him to answer specific prayers, but to hear God's heart for our life, we at some point need stop talking and start listening. What God has to say to us is often much more important than what we have to say to God. The more we listen the more we will recognize his voice.

Read: 1 Samuel 3:4–10

**If you don't have a Bible, we would love to give you one! You can also download a free app called, "Bible" developed by Life.Church*

It took time for Samuel to recognize God's voice. The same is true for us. It will take practice hearing God speak into your life through prayer, the Bible, the Church, and others. Part of that practice is positioning our hearts as Samuel did, "Lord speak, your servant is listening."

Q: What would it look like for you to get into a regular rhythm of practicing getting away with God and listening to His voice?

"But what does God sound like?"

It's interesting that we are supposed to be listening for a voice that we seem to be naturally unfamiliar with. Most people in church would have to admit that they perhaps wouldn't recognize God's voice even if he spoke to them. God can, but rarely does, speak audibly, where our outer ear can hear. But Elijah in 1 Kings 19 speaks of what can be described as an "inner ear." He calls it a "still small voice." It's this knowing, this unctio, this feeling to go there, be careful, stay

away from that, go for it, take a risk, serve, give, be humble, etc. As we begin to follow Jesus, God begins to mold our conscience to speak and inspire us toward characteristics, actions, thoughts, that honor him and spread his love to others. We like to say, "Think thoughts. If you have a thought that requires you to have more humility, generosity, or faith, then it is probably from God. Our best thoughts often come from God's voice."

Practice: Be still. Ask God to speak to you. Think thoughts. Write down any thoughts that "require more humility, generosity, or faith."

"Can I talk back to God?"

Hopefully not like a teenager who just got grounded, but yes! God wants to hear from you too! In fact, Jesus teaches us how to pray in the Bible.

Read: Matthew 6:5–13

7 Keys To Prayer

1. Make Space - We can't spend time with God until we make space.

Q: What does it look like for you to make time for God regularly?

2. Be Yourself - Prayer is not about eloquence; you don't need to impress God.

Q: What does it look like for you to make time for God regularly?

3. Connect With God Intimately - How you think about God determines how you interact with God.

Q: Describe how you picture God.

4. Praise Before You Petition - Give God thanks before asking for something.

Q: Write down three things you are thankful for that God gave you.

5. Expect Heaven - Anticipate God wanting to be involved in your every day life.

Q: What does it look like to invite God into your every day life?

6. Forgive First - Forgive others as you ask God to forgive you.

Q: Who's one person you need to forgive?

7. Ask - God loves specific prayers.

Q: Write down three prayer requests from God in this season.

WORSHIP

Worship, contrary to popular belief, is not just a feeling or an experience, it is a choice. Just like love, worship can often be accompanied by some of the most exhilarating feelings in the world, but it is something I can choose even on a hard day. In worship we learn that even if it's a bad day, we still serve a good God. We don't worship God based on how we feel, but based on who he is. God is, all the time. Meaning, all the time, God is worthy of my praise.

Have you ever noticed that what you magnify tends to get bigger? The moon is already big, but when you look at it through a telescope, it seems to get much bigger! The truth is, it's not actually getting bigger or growing, but the magnification has altered your perspective to help you see just how big the moon was all along.

Worship is like that telescope for us. Sometimes life gets so hard that we lose sight of just how big God is. We forget that he is much bigger than any battle or struggle we could possibly face in this life. But when we start worshipping God, when we magnify his name, we begin to see him for who he really is: A massive, all-powerful, all-loving Father with the world (including all our struggles) in his hands!

This is why David says in Psalm 34:3, *"Oh! Magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together."* When we worship God, he doesn't actually get bigger because he's already as big as it gets. Our perspective of who he is begins to grow, as the weight of our issues begin to shrink to their actual size.

Q: Write down any and all problems in your life that seem too big to conquer:

The bad news is, they might be too great for you to fix.
The good news is, nothing is too great for our God.

Practice: Praise God through difficult/trying feelings and circumstances.

"How do I worship? What does it look like?"

The Bible specifically gives us seven examples to express worship to God:

- 1. Kneeling** - "Let us worship and bow down." - Psalm 95:6
 - 2. Giving Thanks** - "Give thanks in all circumstances." - 1 Thess. 5:18
 - 3. Lifting Your Voice** - "Shout to God with joyful praise!" - Psalm 47:1
 - 4. Singing** - "Sing Psalms and Spiritual songs..." - Colossians 3:16
 - 5. Raising Hands** - "Lift up your hands, bless the Lord!" - Psalm 134:2
 - 6. Surrendering** - "Submit yourselves therefore to God..." - James 4:7
 - 7. Playing Instruments** - "Let the trumpet sound..." Psalm 150:3
-

Q: What forms of worship do you most want to offer God today?

Read: Luke 4:8 - Jesus lays out the entire list of who deserves our praise.

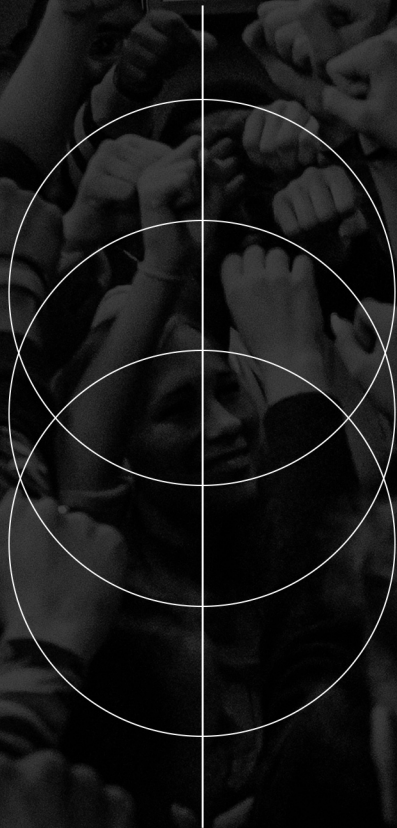
Q: Who all is on that list?

Q: What else in this life seems to attract your praise?

Don't forget that God's always ready and willing to spend time with you! When following Jesus we are free to, *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances..."* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

ESSENTIAL #2

THE CHURCH



ESSENTIAL #5

THE CHURCH

"Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."

Matthew 16:18 NIV

Gathered in Community

When individual followers of Jesus come together we are called the Church. The reality is most people live life spiritually alone, living disconnected from God and his family. The Church largely exists to end spiritual loneliness, to give people a home here and in heaven, connected to God and each other. God never intended for us to do life alone. (*Genesis 2:18*)

Family Language

"But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God." - John 1:12

"He is the Father to the fatherless... this is God." - Psalm 68:5

When we decide to believe in and follow Jesus, it does not matter where you come from, or what you've done, God gives us the right to step into a spiritual family.

Q: How would you describe what your relationship has been with the church up until this point? Have you seen or experienced the church as a family before? Why or why not?

On Mission

In Jesus' final words to his disciples, he clearly lays out their mission as the Church.

Read: Matthew 28:16–20

Q: According to this passage, what is the mission of the church?

Here are some of practices we live out to accomplish this Mission:

Weekend Services

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."
Hebrews 10:24-25

A Typical weekend church service will include:

- 1. Worship/Singing** - Worshipping and singing praise to God together is powerful. It may seem unnatural at first but you don't need to hold back. Jesus gave his life to be close to us, and when we worship God freely, it draws us close to him.
- 2. Prayer** - A pastor or leader will lead everyone in a time of prayer. Feel free to join in, connect with God, and pray for the needs of those around you.
- 3. Teaching from the Bible** - A pastor will give what's known as a "sermon" or "message" that comes from the Bible and is applicable to our lives. We preach with passion and ask the Holy Spirit to help apply it to our lives so it can have a lasting impact.
- 4. Next Step/Announcements** - We love to give people a next step for how to get more connected to the life of the church.
- 5. Giving of Tithes and Offerings** - At each gathering there will be an opportunity to give online or in offering bins. It is honor to give back to God, who gave us all we have in the first place.

Communities

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone?” - Ecclesiastes 4:9-11

Our small groups are called “Communities” because this is exactly what all of us need to go through life and follow God diligently. We believe there is a Community for everyone.

To sign up for a Community, visit captivatesd.com/communities

Giving

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!” - Malachi 3:10

The Bible calls us to give a tithe, 10% of what we earn financially, back to him through the church to help spread the Gospel throughout the world and to build up existing believers. When we do this we recognize that everything we have came from God in the first place. He is all we need, and when we give it loosens the grip greed can have on our lives. We pray that takes what we give and multiplies to help grow His Kingdom in our city.

Q: Which of these most excites you and which seems most challenging?

Church Leadership

The Bible calls the church a body, and Jesus the head of that body (*Colossians 1:18*). God has also appointed men and women to leadership roles in the church to encourage, lead, teach, correct, and strengthen believers.

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.” - Ephesians 4:11-12

Some reading this book may sense a call to one of these church leadership roles. It is a tremendous honor and privilege, and yet will require a great sacrifice.

“Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.” - Hebrews 13:17

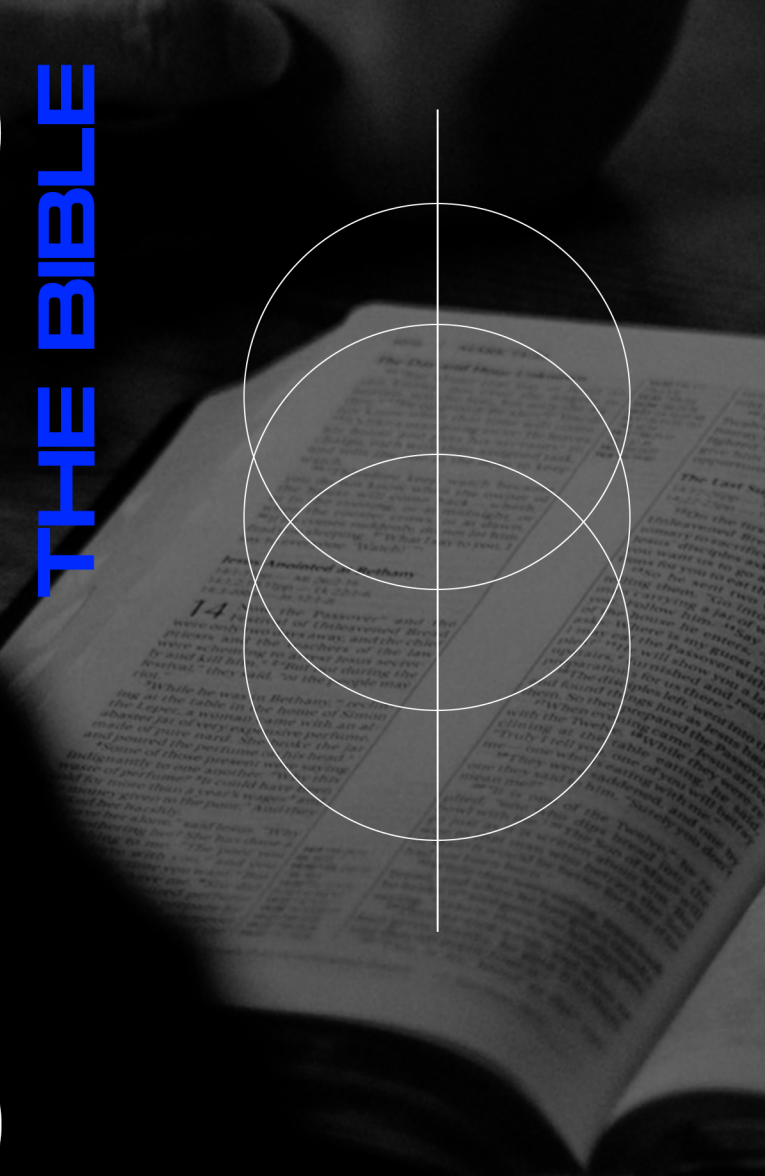
What Jesus' Church Looks Like In Action

Read: Acts 2:42–47

Q: Describe all actions, traits, and benefits of the early church seen here.

ESSENTIAL #3

THE BIBLE



ESSENTIAL #2

THE BIBLE

"Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

Psalm 119:105 NIV

Wouldn't it be great if God gave us a manual for how to live, how to find our purpose, and how to better understand him? Well, that's exactly what the Bible is. When we apply the practices, principles, and commands in the Bible to our lives, we begin to grow and advance in life like never before. But even more than that, The Bible is the very Word of God. It's him expressing his heart and desire for each of our lives. God will not love you more or less if you read the Bible more or less. We do not read it out of obligation to appease him but out of a desire to know him.

Here's what you need to know about the Bible:

1. The Bible is Alive

"12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." - Hebrews 4:12

If you talk to anyone who has practiced reading the Bible for years they will tell you... *"It's alive."* What that means is God often uses it to speak directly into our lives, just what we need to hear, just when we need to hear it. It's one of the key ways God speaks into our lives. We learn God's thoughts for us when reading it.

Q: What answer or direction do you need to hear from God on at this time?

**Ask another believer or leader for scripture references for this topic*

2. The Bible Reveals

Five very important things revealed in Scripture:

- **Who God Is:**
Father (*Matt. 6:9*) **Creator** (*Col. 1:16*) **Love** (*1 John 4:8*)
 - **Who Jesus Is:**
Savior (*John 3:16*) **The Way, Truth, and Life** (*John 14:6*)
 - **Who the Holy Spirit Is:**
Comforter - (*John 14:26*) **Power** - (*1 Tim. 1:7*) **Guide** - (*John 16:13*)
 - **Who We Are:**
Children (*John 1:12*) **Called** (*Jer. 1:5*) **Made New** (*2 Cor. 5:17*)
 - **What Our Purpose Is:**
Make Disciples (*Matt. 28:20*) **Worship God** (*Psalms 57:2*) **Bring Heaven to Earth** (*Mat. 6:10*)
-

Q: Which of the names for God speaks to you the most?

3. The Bible Gives Identity

When we read scripture we are reminded of who God says we are. We remember that what other people say about us means absolutely nothing if it does not align with what God says about us.

Q: What is something negative that has been spoken over your life that does not align with who God says you are?

4. The Bible Corrects

The truth is, without God, our lives get off track. Because we are tempted to sin, do wrong, and walk away from God in the various circumstances in life, we often need correction much like your car will eventually need a tune up. The Bible realigns us back to God's plan for our life.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." - Romans 12:2 NIV

Q: What areas of your life need correction, bringing you back into God's will?

5. The Bible Doesn't Change

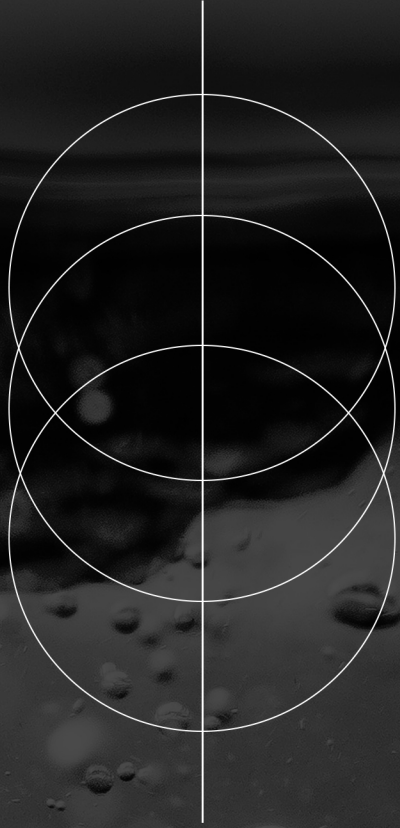
"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." - James 1:17

This verse is great news because it tells us that God's Word won't change! Meaning when God gives us promises, direction, wisdom, and love through his Word, he won't take it back. You can take it to the bank.

Challenge: Begin a reading plan. Make space for God's Word in your life. There are several on the Bible App mentioned earlier in this booklet. Or start by reading the Book of John, 1 chapter a day for 21 days. **You got this!**

ESSENTIAL #4

WATER BAPTISM



ESSENTIAL #3

WATER BAPTISM

"When the people heard this (The Gospel), they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:37-38 NIV

Water Baptism is a symbol of us believing in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. It's also an act of us dying to our old self and committing to follow Jesus. When you go under the water you identify with his death, dying to self. When you come up out of the water, we identify with being raised to new life in Jesus.

4 Reasons We Get Baptized:

1. Jesus Did It

Jesus began his ministry with getting baptized (*Matthew 3:13-17*).

2. It Shows God our Commitment to Him

We say that, "Baptism is an outward expression of an inward devotion." Love is often best expressed through action, where stop just talking about it and actually show it.

3. It Shows Others our Commitment to Him

Baptism is us going FaceBook official with our relationship with God because we aren't ashamed anymore and want people to know our love for him. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."* - Romans 1:16

4. He Asked Us To

God's ask for us to get baptized is very clear in Acts 2. The truth is, we can come up with 10 reasons why we don't need to, and the Devil would love to help with that. But if He gave it all for us, what could possibly hold us back?

Q: What, if anything, holds you back from getting baptized?

challenge: Sign up for the next baptism!

“HAVING BEEN BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM, IN WHICH YOU WERE ALSO RAISED WITH HIM THROUGH YOUR FAITH IN THE WORKING OF GOD, WHO RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.”

COLOSSIANS 2:12 NIV

ESSENTIAL #5

THE HOLY SPIRIT



ESSENTIAL #4

THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Now Christ lives his life in you! And even though your body may be dead because of the effects of sin, his life-giving Spirit imparts life to you because you are fully accepted by God. Yes, God raised Jesus to life! And since God’s Spirit of Resurrection lives in you, he will also raise your dying body to life by the same Spirit that breathes life into you!”

Romans 8:10-11 NIV

We cannot follow Jesus without the power, help, and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We believe that life is not just about what’s physical; It’s not merely about what you can see, taste, hear, smell, and touch. We have emotions, we have thoughts, we have a soul, and we have a spirit. To ignore what is happening in and around our lives spiritually is to ignore the deepest parts of who we are. Our heaviest struggles and our deepest fulfillment will come on a spiritual level, and thanks be to God for giving us the Holy Spirit, an “advocate,” (*John 16:7*) to help us through every up and down.

Q: Based on what you’ve heard, been taught, or have experienced, write down what your view of the Holy Spirit has been up until this point.

Being Filled

"As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit." - Acts 8:15-17

Practice: Pray and ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. We encourage you to connect with a pastor or mature believer and ask them to pray this over you as well.

Once our lives are filled The Holy Spirit gets to work in helping us!

The Holy Spirit:

H – Halts Missteps

- The Spirit wants to give us direction. One way this happens is by the molding and shaping of our conscience. We become more aware of sin and walking away from God in the different areas of our lives. The Spirit gives wisdom and helps lead us to make good and Godly decisions in life. (*John 14:26*)

O – Offers Conviction

- Conviction is a blessing from God! It is a built in alarm system that goes off when we approach anything that will take life from us or someone else. It's this gut feeling that says, "That's wrong, I shouldn't be a part of this, I need to walk away." God's hope is that this is a momentary feeling that helps us make right choices. But if we hold on to the sting of conviction for too long then it can turn into shame, which is not from God. Conviction says, "What I did was wrong." Shame says, "I am wrong." Shame is not from God because embedded in every convicting moment is God's hope for a more life-giving future in your life. The Holy Spirit was sent to convict us from sin. (*John 16:7-8*)
-

Q: What is something that has been convicting you lately?

L – Lends Power

- The world we live in is desperate for the power of God. As believers filled with the Holy Spirit, we can know that wherever we go in this life, God's power goes with us. What this means is at any time God can give us thoughts, prayers, words, verses, actions and encouragements to share with anyone around us to help them draw closer to God and his love. (Acts 1:8)

Y – Yields Gifts & Yields Fruit

- Once filled with the Spirit, we are each given different gifts or abilities with the purpose of better serving people inside and outside the church.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4–11

Here's an example:

Imagine we are having a BBQ at church. Everyone's having a good time, but then all of a sudden someone accidentally drops their plate of food all over the ground. What happens next? Well...

- The person with the gift of **Mercy** says, *"Wow, I'm so sorry, are you ok?"*
- The person with the gift of **Serving** starts cleaning it up.
- The person with the gift of **Encouragement** says, *"Hey, you're still awesome!"*
- The person with the gift of **Teaching** says, *"Well if you carried the plate with two hands and had your food more evenly spread out on the plate then..."*
(God help these people)
- The person with the gift of **Generosity** says, *"Here, have mine."*
- The person with the gift of **Administration** says, *"John you get the mop, Tina you get the trash can, and Brenda you make another plate."*

We all walk into a room, and see a situation differently. We see it differently, on purpose.

Q: Which one of these gifts do you most believe you have?

Challenge: Take a free Spiritual Gifts test at giftstest.com

Q: Write down your results. Share with a friend.

Ultimately, the best way to tell if The Holy Spirit is alive and active in your life is by the fruit your life yields.

Read: Galatians 5:22–23

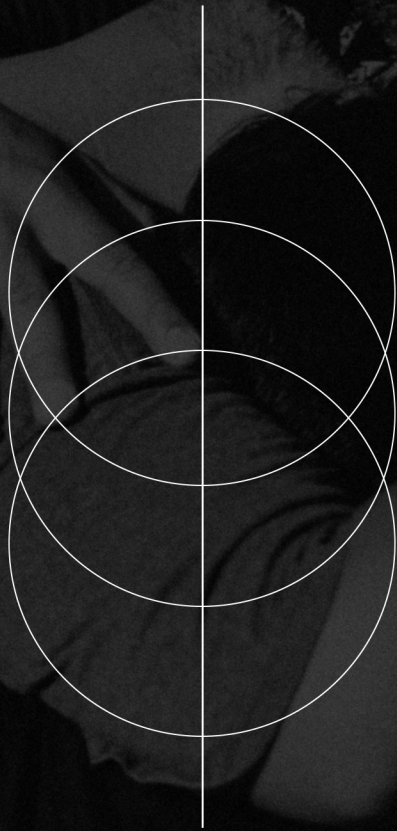
Q: Which fruit do you think has been evident in your life?

Q: Which fruit seem most absent in your life?

Never forget that God is always with us. The Holy Spirit illustrates well one of God's names, Immanuel," which means "God is with us." Never forget that you are never alone. (*1 Corinthians 6:19*)

ESSENTIAL #6

LOVE GOD. LOVE PEOPLE.



ESSENTIAL #7

LOVE GOD. LOVE PEOPLE.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:30-31 NIV

Loving people can be very hard. Of all the unpredictable things in life, people are at the very top. Sometimes it's hard to tell what people will do next. We often do not foresee what painful things others will do or say to us before it happens. Break-ups, gossip, divorce, cheating, lying, stealing, ignoring, forgetting, violating, abusing, comparing... we have all been on the receiving end of at least a few of these if not more. Responding in love, like Jesus, will be one of the most challenging yet rewarding tasks of our lifetime, and God wants to help us do it.

You have probably heard of the 10 Commandments. These were life-giving instructions God gave to his people, through their leader Moses. They have often been viewed as rigid rules to appease God, when in actuality they were given to help us connect with God and with each other. God doesn't just make rules for fun, to control us, or restrict our freedom; every command from God is intended to add life to us individually and those around us.

The 10 Commandments from Exodus 20:

God-Focused

- 1. "No other gods before Me."**
- 2. "Do not make idols."**

At times it becomes easy to put things above God, therefore making them idols.

Q: What plans, possessions, or people do you tend to put above God?

3. "Do not take the Lord's name in vain."

God cares a lot about the words we choose to come out of our mouths. Proverbs 18:21 says, *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."*

Q: What things come out of your mouth that you suppose do not honor God?

4. "Remember the Sabbath Day."

We all need rest. Even God took a day of rest, or Sabbath, after creating the universe. He was modeling to us what we need to be healthy physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Resting in God's presence is a must in life.

Q: What could a new and life-giving "Sabbath rhythm" look like for you?

People-Focused

5. "Honor your Father and Mother."

God loves when we honor those in authority in our lives. It gives them due respect, shares love, and can give us favor with people.

Q: What does it look like for you to honor authority figures, or those you look up to in your life? Is this challenging for you?

- 6. "Do not Murder."
- 7. "Do not commit Adultery."
- 8. "Do not Steal"
- 9. "Do not Lie."

Jesus would tell us not only to not do these things but to not even think these things. He cares more about our hearts than anything else.

Q: Even if its just mental, which of these do you struggle with most?

10. "Do not Covet."

It's very easy to want what someone else has. But the reality is, God gives all good gifts. He has provided for us all we need, and if we don't have it right now it is because he knows we do not need it right now. Perhaps having more than we have would not bring us closer to God but farther way as we would not need to rely on him as much.

Q: If God gave you \$1 million today, do you think it would if draw you closer or further from him?

Read Galatians 1:10 & Philippians 2:3

Q: Who's approval should we really seek and how should we view others?

Forgive Freely

Forgiveness is truly the anthem of Christianity because it is the anthem of Jesus. Jesus forgave us all our sins and therefore asks us to do the same with others. When we choose to forgive, it shows God we understand what he did for us. As Jesus is telling a story about a king who forgave his servant, he shows us how he wants us to view forgiveness by saying, *"I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?"* - Matthew 18:32-33

When we withhold forgiveness from others, it cripples our lives. So many people live bitter, angry, lacking joy and peace, because they are living without forgiving. You will never have the freedom and peace you could have until you learn to forgive those who have hurt you most. We are never more like Jesus than when we choose to forgive.

Challenge:

1. Write down any names of people you need to forgive.
 2. Pray and ask God to heal you and to help you forgive them.
 3. Share with someone who can help you do this.
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Identifying The Correct Opponent

It's easy to make people our enemy in life but we learn in Acts 16 that we have an enemy, and it isn't people. Paul, a key Bible character, is in a place called Philippi (present day Macedonia/Northern Greece) to start a new church. He goes out into the marketplace to invite people to the church gathering but there's a girl there who's disrupting him because the Bible says she was oppressed by a demonic spirit. Paul is called to love all people, but the Bible here tells us he gets "annoyed." We can all relate to that.

What's Paul going to do next? Here's what he does:

"She kept [bothering Paul] for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her." - Acts 16:18

Paul turns around to the spirit, not the girl, and tells it to leave, not the girl. Here he correctly identifies who our enemy in life is. It's not people, it's an enemy who is around people, lying, cheating, deceiving, and stealing. Spiritual warfare is a real thing, and as followers of Jesus we cannot ignore this but need to be ready to love people and pray to God to drive away the enemy. God calls us to be a church that is for people but against the darkness around people.

God is Love

"Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love." - 1 John 4:7-8

Love is not just something that God does, it's who he is. We show the world we are his followers not by how smart, spiritual or strong we are, but by how loving we are. God loves us with an "agape" love. It's a Greek word that means his love for us is indescribable, unending, and eternal, for it does not grow tired or exhaust itself. This means even when we are more broken than we care to admit, we are at the same time more loved than we could ever imagine. We are not loved because we are valuable, we are valuable because we are loved. His love adds value to us, and he calls us to do the same in the world around us.

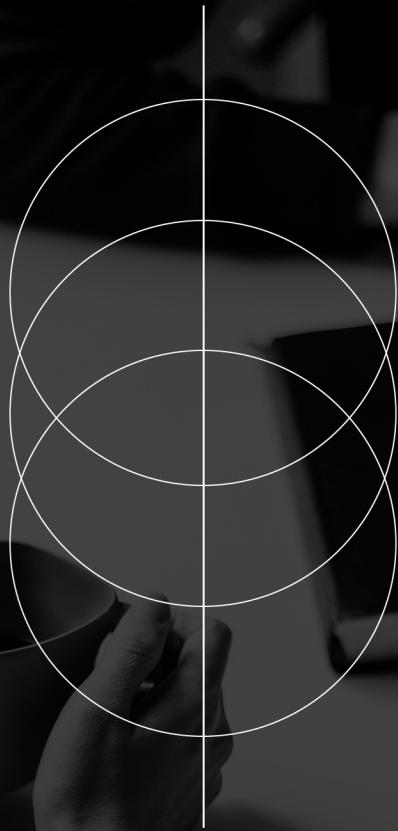
**BUT ANYONE WHO DOES NOT
LOVE DOES NOT KNOW GOD, FOR
GOD IS LOVE."**



MARK 5:19 NIV

ESSENTIAL #7

SHARING YOUR FAITH



ESSENTIAL #6

SHARING YOUR FAITH

“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

Mark 5:19 NIV

Maybe you’ve heard of this word “evangelism.” It’s the the action of spreading the faith we have in Jesus to others. The truth is, it can be a daunting task, especially if you have never done it before.

“What on earth am I supposed to say to them?”

“What if it gets awkward?”

“What if they don’t want to hear it?”

“What if they want to hear more?”

“What if I can’t answer all their questions?”

These are common questions that run through most believers heads when we consider actually sharing Jesus with that person in the cubicle next to ours, in the seat on the plane next to us, a long time friend who’s struggling... just about anyone. But thanks be to God who gave us the greatest tool ever in sharing our faith with others: **our testimony**.

Your Testimony

If you have decided to follow Jesus, then there’s pretty close to 100% chance you have an interesting story of how you ended up at that decision. Most of us did not accept Jesus after we got promoted and bought our second yacht. What actually happened is we most likely got to the point we all need to get to, where we realize how broken we are aside from God. But after choosing to follow Jesus, he begins to fill us with hope, peace, purpose, and joy. This story is called our testimony, and it’s the greatest tool we have in sharing Jesus with others.

From Pain to Purpose

One of the greatest promises from God in the Bible is found in Romans 8:28. It says, *“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.”* At first glance it can be really hard to accept that this is true. We know what painful and ugly things have happened in and around our lives. But one of God’s favorite activities is to take the the pain in our lives and turn it into purpose. That what the devil, God can use for good.

We see this in the life of Joseph (*Genesis 37-50*). Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers because of the jealousy they had for him. Well, 15 years later the tables had turned. Now Joseph’s brothers, who surely assumed Joseph was dead, were starving of a famine and came to Egypt to beg for food. Don’t you know that by this time God had elevated Joseph to be second in command in all of Egypt, only after Pharaoh. He is now in power to either save his brothers lives, or take their lives with revenge. Which would you feel like doing?

Here’s what happened:

“His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. - Genesis 50:18-2

This is real spiritual maturity. God had done such a great work in Joseph’s life that he is now able to not forget what his brothers did, but forgive them and see that God was working the entire time. Even in the hard moments as a slave, in prison, when he was alone, when he was overcome with anxiety, wondering what was going to happen next... He now looks back and sees that God was in every moment, using all of it toward the good of saving lives and spreading his love. God has done the same thing in every one of our lives. What the devil meant for evil in your life, God can and will use it to destroy the works of the devil and set others free all around you!

For the devil thought it was a good idea to put Jesus on the cross, but God used it to destroy death, hell, and the grave... why? Because that’s what God does. He takes what’s broken, wounded, lost, and he brings life out of it. The question is, How has he done that with you?

Practice: Write out your testimony in the space below. Write a version of it that's 4-7 sentences.

Corner Card

The heartbeat of our church is thing we call the “Corner Card.” In Mark 5, Jesus heals a man who had faced years of spiritual oppression and loneliness. It’s natural that after Jesus heals him that the man now wants to go with Jesus wherever he goes. But Jesus says to him, *“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”* So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.” - Mark 5:19-20

The word “home” in the first sentence refers to the people that you most do life with. Sociologists say that we have on average 8-15 people who do life with and see regularly. They can be our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, classmates, clients, people at the gym or coffee shop, etc. And in a city like San Diego where only 5% of the population goes to church regularly, it’s not hard to find people who need Jesus. So here’s what we do on the card:

1. **List...** 8-15 people around you who you have a heart for.
2. **Pray...** daily these people would sense God’s presence and love in their life.
3. **Invest...** in their lives and find creative ways to bless them.
4. **Invite...** them to church and into your Community.
5. **Lead...** them closer to Jesus through the way you live and love.

When we started our church in the fall of 2018, we knew that if we inspired 93,000 people to use a corner card, then we would ensure every person in San Diego would be seen, prayed for, invested in, invited to church, and lead to Jesus.

Q: Write down some names of people around your life that you have a heart for and that need Jesus.

Challenge: Grab a card. Change your world. Write down some names of people around your life that you have a heart for and that need Jesus.

The Gospel In 2 Words

If someone does ask you what the Gospel is, you can share with them the two words Jesus shares with us in Luke 24:46-47, *"It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that **repentance** and **remission of sins** should be preached in His name to all nations."*

Repentance - Repentance means to turn away from your sin, but we don't actually have the power to do that on our own. What we need is not just to "turn" from sin but "return" back to God. Repentance is us making a conscious decision that says, "I need God, and am broken without him." Then we ask him to forgive us as we commit to following him.

Remission - Remission is a huge gift! It is the cancellation of a debt owed, and in our case it is the cancellation of our debt of sin that Jesus paid for. The Bible teaches us that if we choose repentance, he gives remission. *"Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out."* - Acts 3:19

**“GO HOME TO YOUR OWN PEOPLE
AND TELL THEM HOW MUCH THE LORD
HAS DONE FOR YOU, AND HOW HE HAS
HAD MERCY ON YOU.”**

MARK 5:19 NIV

LASTING WORD

Life is hard. Some people believe that after following Jesus it should get easier. This unfortunately is not always true. Sometimes life gets even harder for a season! God has no problem using hard situations to test your faith. The other reality is that we have an enemy, and before you said "yes" to following Jesus, maybe the enemy didn't even realize that you existed. Now you have a target on your back because the devil knows something that you need to know:

With Jesus...

*You are going to **live with purpose.***

*You are going to **never be alone again.***

*You are going to **spread his love.***

*You are going to **help bring heaven to earth.***

*You are going to **change your world.***

*You are going to **see God change lives all around you.***

And there's nothing the devil can do to stop it. **Keep Believing. Keep Following. Go to Him, every day.**

"We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

"We never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!"

- 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, 16-17

