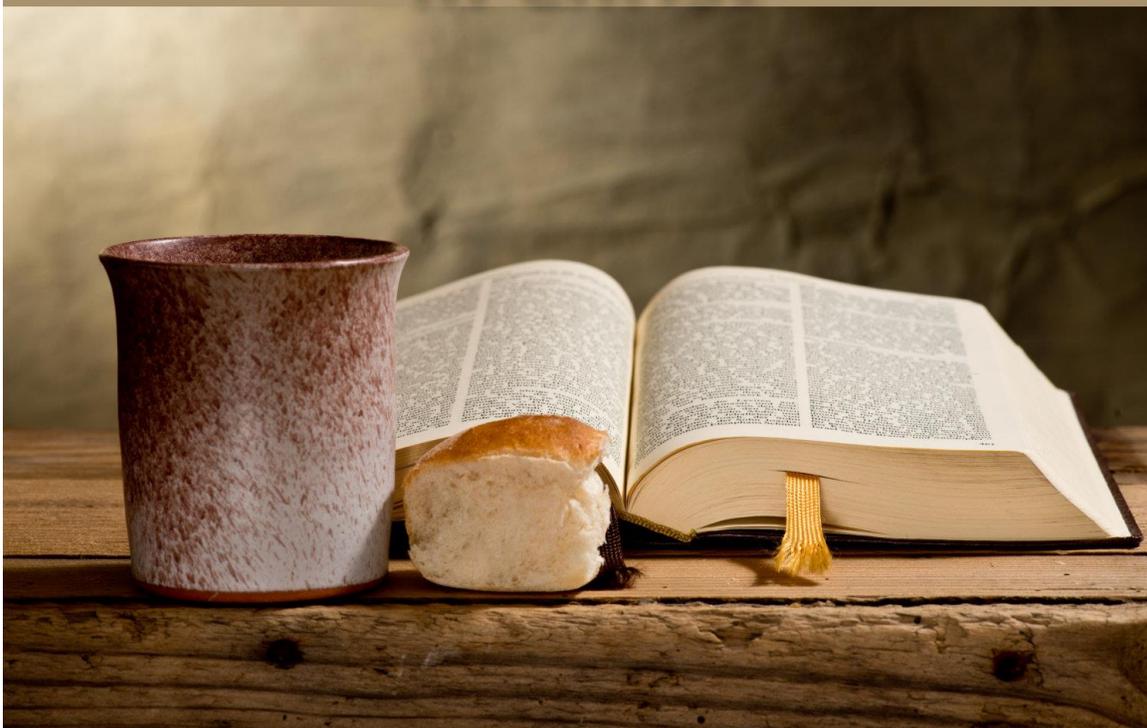


WHAT'S NEXT?

**Spiritual Nourishment
for New Believers
in Christ**



J. Hawkins

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INTRODUCTION

Making the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior is the most important decision you will ever make. It is the one decision that has eternal significance.

The word “Christian” is often misused. A Christian is someone who has placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from sins. Christians believe that Jesus is God’s Son, who died on a cross to take the punishment for their sins. They believe Jesus rose from the dead and is now alive with God in heaven. Christians are also known as “Believers.” We will talk much more about what all of that means in this book.

Unfortunately there is a lot of misinformation regarding the Christian life. It is important that you get the basics right. Failure to understand the basics can lead sincere, well-meaning people down the wrong path.

Sometimes new believers jump into serving the church too quickly, before they understand the basics, only to become disillusioned later—believing they are not saved or that they do not want to be saved anymore. Sometimes other people are so excited about another person accepting Christ that they elevate new believers into positions they are not ready for; which sets the new Christian up for failure.

The words in this book are meant to provide a solid foundation on which you can build your Christian life. Your true foundation is always Jesus based on God’s Word, the Bible. God is never-changing. He is the same God today as He was yesterday and will be tomorrow. God never changes, and neither does His word.

NEW BIRTH, NEW LIFE, OR BORN AGAIN?

In order for anyone to go to heaven they must be born again.

You may have heard someone say that when you accepted Christ you have become “born again.”

That expression comes from a teaching of Jesus found in the New Testament book of John, chapter 3. A man named Nicodemus asked Jesus what he had to do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus went on to explain that this meant a spiritual rebirth, not a physical rebirth. We are born spiritually when we accept Jesus as our Savior.

Jesus also said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.” When you are born again, you are born into the family of God, making God your heavenly Father and you His child.

Everyone starts out the same when they are born again into the family of God. You are spiritually a newborn baby. You aren't a baby in age, but in newness of life in Christ Jesus. Just as a new baby needs proper nourishment and tender loving care, so do you, as a baby in the family of God.

Babies do not start out eating solid food; neither do spiritual babies. Milk is a baby's first food and solids are introduced as the digestive system matures. Think of this book as your spiritual milk, a first food for new believers in Christ. This book is one tool that is meant to give you a foundation for spiritual growth in an easily digestible form. It is only the beginning. Just as physically we never stop eating, the same is true spiritually. As you grow, you will continue to digest more substantial “food.”

WHAT IS SIN?

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” –Romans 3:23

The Greek definition for the word “sin” includes “to miss the mark.” When you hear the word “sin” you can think of it as “missing the mark, or standard, that was set by God.” No matter how good a person may be, the only one who never missed the mark was Jesus Christ. No living person, past or present, has ever lived up perfectly to God’s standard except for Jesus Christ.

You might wonder, “Why do I need Jesus to save me?” It is because we have all sinned and fall short of God’s standards. We need someone who is without any sin at all to be our bridge to God. God sent Jesus to live a perfect, sinless life and die on the cross in order that He would take the punishment for the sins that we commit. When Jesus died, He suffered the wrath of God as a substitute for you and I because we were going to hell for our sins. Because He was perfect and He is God, Jesus rose from the dead, defeating hell forever for those who place their faith in Him. God gave us that substitute so we wouldn’t have to face God’s wrath when we die. Jesus is the only one who can save man from the wrath of God. Salvation means you are saved from the wrath of God by believing in Jesus’ death and resurrection for your sins.

Salvation is only possible through faith in Christ alone. The only way we are saved is by our faith. We cannot earn salvation by doing good things (also called “good works”). We could never live up to God’s standard.

But every human being can get through to God’s presence because of what Jesus went through on the cross. Man was separated from God because of sin, and what Jesus did brought man back into a right relationship with God. What a gift! All man has to do is accept that gift. Each person must individually decide whether or not they will accept the gift of salvation through faith in Christ.

The fact that God gives this gift freely to all who accept it is called GRACE. We are saved by the grace of God, not by the good things we do. Salvation is dependent upon the shed blood of Jesus. No one is saved by just believing the Bible is true, you must receive the Savior as your own. Lots of people believe that Jesus was nothing more than a good man, that He was a prophet from God, or that He was some kind of angel. Those things aren’t true. Unless you believe that Jesus is God’s only Son, and you believe in the shedding of His blood for your sins, you cannot receive salvation.

John 1:12 reads, “But as many as received Him, to those He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name.” This is a foundational truth. Man is saved by grace. Grace is unmerited favor. No one is saved by what they do or don’t do, nor is salvation based on how good or bad a person is. This is important to know because it is not uncommon for new believers to question their salvation early on, or even later at certain times.

Believers must know how to deal with sin biblically. Not only are we saved by grace but also we live by grace. Just as we could not save ourselves, we cannot overcome sin. To overcome sin, we must yield ourselves to God and trust Him alone; He overcomes the sin in us through the Holy Spirit.

1 John 1:9 states God will forgive believers of sin when they confess their sin to Him; the believer will surely and immediately be forgiven. Sin breaks fellowship with God, but not Son-ship with God. When you are born into God's family it is not reversible.

You are either saved or you are not. It is essential to be clear on this point. Any doubt in this area will trip up new believers, especially when dealing with sin. Only those who have believed in Christ can have assurance that they will have eternal life. Jesus paid the sin price for you.

God's Word is the evidence that one is saved. In the near future you may not feel saved and may begin to wonder if you were ever saved. You may have doubts. God never changes and neither does His word so if it says you are saved, then you are saved.

Assurance is not based on feelings, belonging to a church, or obeying religious rules. Feelings can be very deceiving. A person may feel well but be seriously ill. It is possible for a person to feel that he is saved when he is not, he may have put his trust in religion (going to church, believing in God, but not believing in Christ).

It's all about having faith in the correct object. Feelings are important but they cannot be the only basis for assurance of salvation. The assurance is based on the Word of God; the facts of what God has done, not how one feels. It is important for you as a Christian to be assured that God is your Father and that you have eternal life. Since feelings change, assurance must stand on the Word of God. 1 John 5:13 tells us "you may know that you have eternal life." (John 3:16, John 20:31)

Jesus assures us in John 6:47 that we have eternal life the moment we believe in Him. If your assurance hinges on anything other than the finished work of Christ on the Cross, you will find yourself in trouble.

Here are some Bible verses to remember:

1 John 5:13: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

John 6:40: "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

John 1:12: "But as many as received Him, to those He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name."

WHAT IS FAITH?

“Faith is belief or trust in someone or something that is true without you seeing it.” –Valerie Kemp

Faith is key not only in becoming saved but also in living the Christian life. One cannot be saved without faith. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that no man can please God without faith. Believers must understand the concept of faith. Faith is being confident that something is true.

There are two types of faith: generic faith and saving faith. Generic faith is what we all exercise every day, faith that the elevator will get us to the floor we are going to, faith that a chair will hold your body weight if you sit in it, etc.

We believe many things and trust many people. We take a certain medicine because we believe it will help us, we get on the bus to go places because we trust that the bus driver will get us there. This is generic faith. When it comes to salvation, it is not simply enough to have faith. You must put your faith in the proper person. A person may know and believe what God has revealed in His Word but does not put his trust in Christ as his Savior.

Saving faith is faith in Jesus Christ that results in eternal life. Saving faith put you right with God, and it is through this faith that you can be at peace with God. (see Romans 5:1) Our sins are forgiven through faith in Christ. (Romans 3:22-25) God counts us to be right with Him if we have faith. (Romans 4:5) We are saved by God’s grace through faith. (Ephesians 2:8-10) No man can please God without faith. (Hebrews 11:6)

It is desirable that we have a strong faith or lots of faith, but when it comes to saving faith is it best to have your faith in the right object. The object of your faith saves you, not the quantity.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Those who operate through the Holy Spirit are more equipped to resist temptation.” –Monica Johnson

Every Christian has two natures. This is important to understand if you want to grow and progress as a Christian. In the Bible and in church you will hear references to the “old nature” and the “new nature.” When we are born into this world we receive the old nature, which is also called the flesh. We receive a new nature when we believe in Christ and are born again. The two natures are always fighting against each other. They are enemies, and are in constant conflict. (See Galatians 5:17, Romans 7:15-25, Romans 8:6)

Nothing can make the flesh or the old nature better. The flesh is the enemy of God. It does not and cannot obey God’s teachings. Unfortunately, we do not lose the flesh when we are born again. We won’t lose the flesh until we die physically. Sometimes it appears that the flesh is more evil after a person is saved; this may be because of the presence of the new nature, whereas before the flesh had no competition.

The new nature comes from God. The new nature cannot sin. We still sin because the old nature, the flesh, remains the same in us. Since the flesh does not change, Christians continue to struggle with sin as long as they live. Christians should strive to live according to the new nature and not the flesh or old nature.

There are two types of Christians, those who do what the old nature wants them to do and those who obey their new nature. Understanding the presence, position, and relationship of the old and the new within the life of a believer is essential to experiencing a wholesome and balanced spiritual life.

You can only have victory by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since Christians still have a sinful nature and are capable of sinning, victory over sin can be theirs only by yielding themselves to the Lord and walking in moment-by-moment dependence upon the **Holy Spirit**. (See Romans 6:11-14; Galatians 5:16)

When a person becomes born again, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within that person, to serve a critical role in spiritual growth. He gives understanding to the things of God. It is hard for us to understand how He lives in the believer or how His power can help us live for God. But we must believe it and listen for the Holy Spirit to guide us.

The Holy Spirit is a person. He is not an “it.” The Holy Spirit is eternal and equal with God the Father, and Jesus—God the Son. (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14) You receive the Holy Spirit the moment you accepted Jesus as your Savior and He will never leave you. (Ephesians 1:13) God puts a seal on us that we are His and that seal is the Holy Spirit.

Christian maturity is growth which the Holy Spirit produces over a period of time in the believer. The same amount of time is not required for each individual, but some time is necessary for all. It is not time itself which produces maturity, it is the progress made, and growth achieved that counts.

THE BIBLE

“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” –1 Peter 2:2

Nearly everything you buy comes with an operating manual or an owner’s manual that spells out how to operate the purchased item. The manual also lists the parts that should be included, and shows the new owner how all the parts work together for optimal function. Even though some people can look at an item and figure out how it works without reading the manual; as a rule it is best to read the manual before assembling and using the item.

The Bible is your owner’s manual, the operational manual, for Christian living. The Bible is written by the One who created you and knows all about you. Before you were born, He knew you. Who better to guide you in your Christian living than your creator? Someone has said the letters that spell Bible stand for “**B**asic **I**nstructions **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth.”

The Bible is the blueprint for human history. It begins with the origin of man and ends with the destiny of man. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16) This verse tells us that God inspired all Scripture and that it is profitable to us. Every believer must read the Bible regularly in order to continue to grow properly, and have a right relationship with God.

“Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow...” (1 Peter 2:2) As you mature, your system will be ready for solid food, which is also found in the Word of God. Believers should always desire the Word of God. Just as physically we never stop eating in order to grow, the same is true spiritually. The Word of God is the food of believers. (see Matthew 4:4)

You can count on the Bible to be true regardless of what is going on around you. It is the real history book. The Bible explains everything. It contains the mind of God, the state of man, and the way of salvation. Studying the truth of God gives one a firm foundation for his Christian life.

Do not leave your spiritual growth to chance. Think of the Bible as your navigational system. Just as with the GPS in your car or on your smart phone, you no longer have to be at the mercy of bad or vague directions, or having to remember every turn you need to make. You don’t have to go it alone. The map and the voice will guide you step by step. Think of the map as your Bible and the voice as the Holy Spirit; the two will always agree. Reading the Bible regularly gives the Holy Spirit room to feed you with deeper truths.

Living according to what the Bible says will save you from getting the gospel message wrong and living a defeated life. It will save you from well-intentioned people who themselves were misled or do not read the Bible because they depend on their pastor or priest to teach them all they need to know. You must read the Bible for yourself. The true standard of conduct is the

Word of God and not the example or opinion of others. When you seek out the Bible's answer to a problem, you are less likely to give in to that "old nature."

There are many names for the Bible. The most common names are the Word of God, the Scriptures, the Holy Bible, and the Good Book. There are many Bible translations such as the King James Version or the New International Version. As you grow you will discern which translation(s) will help you grow best in Christ.

The Bible is divided into two major parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Each testament is divided into books and each book is divided into chapters. Each chapter is divided into verses. For example, the biblical reference John 3:16 is found in the New Testament, book of John, the 3rd chapter and the 16th verse.

There are sixty-six books in the Bible: thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. The Old Testament books begin with the creation of our universe and tell what happened in the time period prior to Jesus' coming to earth as a baby. The New Testament books tell of Jesus' life on earth, His establishment of His church, and foretells what will happen in the last days. The first four books in the New Testament are referred to as "the gospels" because they specifically tell about the events that happened while Jesus was on earth. They are written by four different men: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The word "gospel" means "good news."

The Bible is the inspired word of God. This means that God divinely influenced the human authors of the books of the Bible in such a way that what they wrote were the very words of God.

Believers will always need to feed themselves on the Word of God. Just as physically we never stop eating in order to grow, the same is true spiritually. As you read and study the Bible, the Word of God gets into your system and is spiritually digested to deliver the needed nourishment to grow on.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

“Water baptism precedes the Lord’s Supper in the order of their institution... Jesus instituted water baptism at the beginning of His earthly ministry and the Lord’s Supper on the night that He was betrayed.” –John Bellingham

TWO IMPORTANT COMMANDS

The Jewish people were the people whom God decided the lineage of Jesus Christ would come from. They are the Israelites, God’s children, God’s people in the Old Testament. To show that they belonged to Him, God gave the Jews many religious laws to keep but to Christians He gave two commandments: We should practice baptism and keep the Lord’s Supper. Both are reserved only for believers to remind Christians of Christ’s death on the cross. God intended that these things should draw His people together.

BAPTISM

The Bible teaches that a person’s body should be put completely under the water when he/she is baptized and raised so that he walks in newness of life when he come up out of the water. (Romans 6:3-4) It is symbolic that our old self was crucified with Christ on the cross. Baptism is a picture of dying, being buried, and then raised to a new life. (See Colossians 2:12) This is called baptism by immersion. Baptism is an outward showing of the inward change that has taken place in a believer. When we are baptized we are making a public statement that we have been born again.

Some people who were baptized as a baby by sprinkling of water wonder if that is “good enough” to fulfill God’s command regarding the necessity of baptism. The example we see in Scripture is baptism by immersion only after a person has made a declaration of having been born again through faith in Christ. Babies cannot make that decision for themselves. Even Jesus was baptized by immersion in the Jordan River. Another example in the Bible of baptism by immersion is found in Acts 8:36-39.

WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER?

On the night before Jesus was crucified, He shared a meal with His closest disciples. In that meal, He broke bread and took wine and declared that they were representative of His body and blood, shed for all so that sins could be forgiven. The bread represents Christ’s body. The wine represents His blood. Grape juice is often used instead of fermented wine. The wine Jesus used was new wine, which had not been fermented.

The Lord’s Supper is found Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-23, John 13.

Some churches serve the Lord's Supper every Sunday and others once a month. Some churches celebrate it every three months.

The Lord's Supper is also referred to as "breaking bread." We should break bread together with other Christians, in remembrance of Christ. We should also pray and examine ourselves before taking the Lord's Supper so we do not take of it wrongly. We want to come before Jesus with our sins confessed and with no anger or malice in our hearts towards others. (See 1 Corinthians 11:23-30)

WHAT'S NEXT?

“Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion—it is a daily process whereby you grow to be more and more like Christ.” –Billy Graham

Follow Jesus. If you have made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, then your goal as a Christian is to become more Christ-like in how you relate to the world around you. Followers of Jesus do their best to make decisions that will honor and please Him. It is a process and you won't always get it right, but each day you should be growing to be more like Christ. The Word of God tells us in 2 Peter 3:18 that we should grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Growing to be more like Christ is a life-long process.

Prayer is an integral part of every believer's life. Prayer is the believer's way of communicating with God. We talk to God and we also give space to hear from God when we pray. Praying is both profound and simple. Every saved person can pray. Prayer is simply talking to God.

Unbelievers will pray to God when they are having problems, like the sailors did in the Old Testament book of Jonah 1:14-16, but it is only believers who can pray to God as their Father. God always hears the prayers of his children.

The Church

Connecting with people who are also striving to be more like Christ helps strengthen our own faith. Every new believer should connect with a Bible-teaching church. The word “church” is used to refer to a local body of believers as well as all believers of the entire world. The church is called the body of Christ. (Colossians 1:18) The Bible describes the church like a human body with many different parts that all work together. Each part is important. The body needs each part and each part depends on the other. (See Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

Being a member of a Bible believing, Bible teaching church promotes spiritual growth. God gives every Christian work to do for him. (Mark 13:34) The church is a place you can use the gifts God has given you to spread the good news.

The primary responsibility of the church is to share the gospel with unbelievers and to help fellow Christians grow in their faith. It is also the responsibility of every Christian as well, since we are the church, the body of Christ.

Welcome, brother or sister in Christ. Choosing Jesus was the best decision you ever made.

