

www.ShepherdServe.org

You are welcome to distribute printed copies of this document, or copy and paste this document to distribute via email, as long as the document is unaltered and kept in its *entirety* (including copyright notices), and is not sold for profit. However, if you wish to post this material on your website or anywhere else online, you must first contact us to get permission. ©2007 by David Servant

Forgive Me for Waiting so Long to Tell You This
by David Servant

ELEVEN

What Next?

So now you are a new believer in Jesus Christ. Happy Spiritual Birthday!

What do you do now? Of course, your entire motivation for living has been radically changed. Now your life's ambition is to please God. You love Him, and because you love Him, you want to obey Him.

In God's eyes, you are a brand-new spiritual baby, and He wants you to grow up-spiritually. He wants you to become like Jesus. That will take some time. It will require effort on your part.

In this short chapter, I want to share with you what you should do to begin your spiritual journey. Keep in mind that our goal, of course, is to become like Jesus.

Reading the Bible

Obviously, if you want to become like Jesus, you'll have to get to know Him. There are four records of His life, called the *Gospels*, contained in the New Testament. Written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, each author tells Jesus' story from a little different perspective, so you need to read them all.

After the Gospels, the book of Acts tells about the early Church, its leaders and the spread of the gospel.

Next you'll find a collection of letters written to the early Christians by Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude. All of these men were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write their letters. That means you can read them as personal love-letters from God.

You should read those letters after you've finished the four Gospels. It's important to read the New Testament before you begin reading the Old Testament. The New Testament was written for Christians-people who are living under the new covenant (or promises) that Jesus inaugurated. You are living under that new covenant with God.

I can guarantee you that you won't understand everything you read in the Bible the first time, but don't worry about it-just apply what you *do* understand. The more you read and study the Bible, the more you'll learn. The Bible is such an amazing book that you

can read it over and over a thousand times and still won't know all there is to know. I encourage you to read a portion of the Bible every day.

If you want some help understanding the Bible as you read it each day, I've written another book titled *Your Best Year Yet*. It is a daily commentary that will help you read through the entire Bible in one year. You can order a copy at any Christian bookstore or by using the mail-in form at the end of this book.

Finding a Church

You will also need to attend a church regularly where the Bible is faithfully preached. Unfortunately, the true gospel is not preached in all churches, so you need to be careful.

How can you find a good church to attend? First of all, ask the person who gave you this book. Chances are, he or she is born again and attends a church where the Bible is preached.

When you are in a church where the people are born again, they are warm and friendly. If you feel unwelcome, you're not among true Christians. Keep looking. Make certain the church you attend is full of *true Christians* not just religious people who think they are Christians.

God will also use other Christians to help you to grow spiritually. They are your older brothers and sisters, spiritually speaking. That is another way to tell if you are in a church where the people really understand the gospel-many times they refer to one another as their fellow "brothers and sisters in Christ."

Another way to determine if you are in a good church is to ask the pastor if he agrees with the message contained in this book! If a pastor doesn't agree with the fundamental message of Jesus' death on the cross for the propitiation of our sins and that we are saved through repentance and faith in Jesus, then that pastor needs to be saved himself.

There are many different viewpoints concerning minor doctrinal matters among churches and ministers, but all true Christians agree on the basic biblical gospel. If the pastor doesn't believe the simple gospel message, find one who does.

A God-called pastor is specially equipped with certain gifts that enable him to help you grow. You definitely need to place yourself under the care of a loving, Bible-preaching pastor. He is a gift from God to you.

Being Baptized in Water

Ask your new pastor to baptize you in water as soon as possible. Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Of course, being baptized doesn't save you, but it is one of the first things that authenticates your true repentance and faith.

If your pastor says that it is not important to be baptized, keep looking for a good church. Chances are if a pastor doesn't obey the clear and simple commandment to baptize new Christians, he won't be following the Bible in a lot of other areas as well.

You may have been baptized as a baby in a church, or maybe you weren't, but it doesn't make any difference. The Bible teaches that everyone should be baptized *after* he or she professes faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Your infant baptism had nothing to do with your own personal acceptance of Jesus.

Why is water baptism so important? Because it is symbolic of what happened to Jesus and you. Jesus died, was buried, and was raised from the dead. You also, in Christ, have died, been buried, and come back to life as a brand-new person, washed clean from sin!

Sharing the Gospel

You have no doubt already felt the urge to tell others about what you have learned. You know that if they don't repent and believe the gospel, they are going to spend eternity in hell. God's love in you is what causes that compassion for unsaved people to well up in your heart.

I recommend that you go slowly as you begin to share your new-found faith with others. I say that because I made many mistakes when I first began "witnessing" to my unsaved friends. Usually I wound up arguing about minor doctrinal points of their particular church's creed rather than effectively communicating the simple gospel of God's love expressed through Jesus' sacrifice.

To make matters worse, I came across as a know-it-all and realize now that I was too pushy with my potential converts. So I'm recommending that you begin by *praying* on a daily basis for your friends and relatives who aren't yet saved.

Before you tell them about the change that has happened in your life, you need to *demonstrate* a changed life. When they notice the change and begin asking you what has happened, then it's a good time to gently and respectfully tell them what God has done for you (see 1 Peter 3:15-16). If they laugh, don't retaliate or criticize their particular beliefs. Forgive them, continue to pray for them, and look for opportunities where you can serve them. Love can melt a hardened heart.

Be careful that you don't unconsciously portray a "holier-than-thou" attitude to those who are unsaved. Obviously, you won't be participating any longer in the sinful practices of those who don't believe in Jesus, but you must take precaution lest others think that you imagine yourself to be better than they are. Don't ever forget that you once acted just as they do and that it's only because you heard the gospel and responded that you no longer live a life of sin. We are saved only because of God's mercy, so we certainly have no right to be proud.

If you spend a lot of time with *unreceptive* unbelievers, they will drag you down spiritually. That is another reason why you need to be fellowshipping with other Christians regularly and not *just* in church. As you grow spiritually, your closest friends will become those who are part of your spiritual family-the family of God.

Prayer

Because God is now your Father, you will want to develop your relationship with Him. You don't have to be in church to talk with Him because He's *with* you and *in* you all the time by the Holy Spirit. He wants you to enjoy fellowship with Him all day long.

When you pray, you don't need to use "Thee's" and "Thou's." Just talk to God as you would talk to your father because He is your Father. Of course, speak very respectfully! When you pray and ask Him for something, make certain that what you are asking for is in His will, based upon a promise you've found in the Bible. Then you can pray with faith, certain that God will give you your request.

The apostle John wrote:

And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him (1 John 5:14-15).

When Jesus' disciples once requested that He teach them how to pray, He told them,

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.’” (Matthew 6:9-13)

Jesus did not expect His followers to memorize and continually repeat this exact prayer every time they prayed. This short prayer, however, is a wonderful model for us to follow.

First, we should realize that we are praying to our Father with whom we have a relationship. We are children speaking to our Father, not foreign beggars speaking to a dictator!

Second, our foremost desire should be for God’s kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth to the same degree as it is being done in heaven. Of course, God’s will is being done perfectly in heaven because everyone there is completely obedient to Him. *It should be our supreme desire that everyone on earth obey Him as well.* More than anything else, we should desire that God’s kingdom will expand on earth as more people hear the true gospel and submit to Him in obedient faith.

If our priorities are in order, our prayers for our own temporal needs will take second place to our desire for God’s kingdom to come and for His will to be done on the earth. We then pray for our daily bread *after* we’ve prayed for what is most important. Most Christians in America don’t need to ask God for daily bread anyway, because we already have more food than we need. That being so, it would be better if we would ask God to supply the needs of His poorer children, and ask what we can do to help.

Dealing With Sin in Our Lives

Because our supreme desire is that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and because we know that God wants us to be holy, and because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we feel terrible when we sin. Thank God that we can ask for and receive forgiveness, just as Jesus told us in His model prayer.

When you first repented and received Christ as Savior, that didn’t mean you would immediately start living a life of sinless perfection. The reason is because, when you first repent, you can only repent of the sins of which you are conscious.

As you continue growing spiritually, God will reveal further areas of your life that need repentance. That is the process which is referred to in the Bible as *sanctification*. Sanctification is a progressive work in your life.

We need to keep in mind that when we stumble, it doesn’t mean that we’re not saved. It just means that we’re not yet perfect. The apostle James wrote, “For we all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2). Of course, stumbling into sin and willfully practicing sin are not the same thing. Those who are *willfully practicing sin without concern* are not truly saved.

As Christians, we are often tempted, and even though we have a new nature in our spirits, we still possess the old sinful nature, something the apostle Paul called *the flesh*. Our responsibility is to follow the new inward nature that leads us to obey God, and resist the old nature that tempts us to do wrong. Because sin’s power has been broken over us, we no longer have to sin. The Holy Spirit within us is much more powerful than any temptation. We should develop our faith in His ability to keep us from all sin.

What should you do if you sin after your initial repentance? The apostle John told us that “if we *confess* our sins, He is faithful and righteous to *forgive* us our sins and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9; emphasis added). Once we confess our sins, they are forgiven by God, by means of Jesus’ death.

However, as Jesus also explained in His model prayer, God’s forgiveness is conditional upon our forgiving others who have sinned against us. We can’t expect mercy if we don’t show mercy. Jesus said, “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matthew 6:14-15). We must forgive anyone and everyone who asks us if we want God to forgive us when we ask Him.

A Word of Caution

Satan has no power over you, but he is a master at deception, and that is the primary means he uses to trip Christians. The way to avoid being tricked is to know what God has said and then do what He has said.

God’s Word is your greatest spiritual weapon. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, He always responded by quoting and obeying God’s Word. So should we.

If you ever think that God has spoken to you to do something that contradicts what He has already said in the written Word, you are mistaken because God never contradicts Himself.

And Finally...

If you have been born again through reading this book, would you be so kind to write a short note and tell me? I would greatly appreciate it, and it would fill me with joy to hear of another person who has become a member of God’s worldwide family. You can write me at: P.O. Box 12854, Pittsburgh, PA 15241. Thanks! I look forward to hearing from you!