

God's Message For YOU



*A Conversation about
Finding God and Living as a Christian*

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A Conversation about

Finding God and Living as a Christian

If you have questions:

Email to: minister@leonardchurch.com

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Leonard church of Christ

P.O. Box 219

323 S. US 69, Leonard TX 75452

1st Edition – December 2019

2nd Edition – March 2020

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Introduction

This book was written as an easy to read and easy to understand guide for those who are curious and for those interested in sharing — those who are curious may be looking for answers to basic questions about the Bible, ‘church’, and the Christian life. Those interested in sharing may have those answers, but want a simple, clear way to share that knowledge with others.

The first group is made up of people who are curious about what the Bible is. Perhaps you went to Bible school as a child but haven’t been back for many years. Now, the pressures of life and desire to properly rear children or influence grandchildren has you thinking about God. The same curiosity may result from a tragic event, the death of a loved one or the realization that life can be taken in an instant. A previous confidence in self rather than in God is fading and now the

question of what happens after I die clouds your mind.

Perhaps you believe in God and attend worship services regularly but notice the Bible is seldom mentioned or read and the impact to daily life is hardly noticed. You realize this can't be the full life Jesus promised.

Finally, perhaps the challenge you face is more related to how you share the good news that you have. You may be hesitant to risk a friendship or strain a family relationship. You've been told you can't talk about these things at work, yet these are the people you have grown to care about.

This book was written to fill these needs by putting an overview of the key information in one place making it easy to read, understand, and share.

1

Where to Begin?

The only way to get to the bottom of something is to go to the source. So that is where we will start in this book; the source of everything we know about God, the Bible. The Bible is the inspired word of God, which means that although it was written down by people, God is the actual author.

While the Bible appears to be one big book, it is a collection of sixty-six smaller books brought together into one volume. These books are written in a variety of styles and serve different purposes. They generally fall into categories like history, prophecy, poetry, wisdom literature, and letters.

The Bible was written over a period of about 1600 years in three different languages (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic). It was written on three different

continents (Africa, Asia and Europe) by close to forty different people.

The authors were real people and came from different walks of life having different backgrounds and professions. There were shepherds, kings, prophets, fishermen, doctors, and others. Most of them didn't know each other personally.

Because the 66 books ultimately have one author, there is a common theme running throughout them. From beginning to end, the Bible describes God, His love for people and His desire to have them live with Him for eternity.

This is where the plan of salvation comes into view—being saved from the eternal penalty for sins. God's message is that this salvation is available to all who repent of, which means "to turn away from," their sins and commit to following him with all their heart.

In addition to having a common theme, these sixty-six books are historically and scientifically accurate, even though written long ago.

God's word truly is an amazing collection of writings. Can you imagine trying to put sixty-six different books together that were written over a 1600-year time period by so many people from so many backgrounds and having them all fit together without error or contradiction?

This alone should tweak your curiosity about both the book and its author.

Two Main Parts

The Bible is divided into two main parts. The first section, called the "Old Testament," is made up of thirty-nine books. These books deal with God's relationship with mankind before the coming of Jesus.

The Old Testament is an important part of the Bible because in it we learn a lot about God and his expectations of mankind.

The Old Testament is also important because only through reading and understanding it, can we see the full nature of God's plan for people. It shows that God planned from the beginning to send Jesus as the sacrifice and payment for our sins and his purpose in uniting those who believe in him in the church.

The second section, the "New Testament," is made up of twenty-seven books and begins with "the gospels" (which means "the good news") namely **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John**. These tell us the important events from Jesus' life here on earth, from his birth to his death, and then his resurrection (being raised from the dead) and ascension (going back into heaven).

It is important to remember, as you read the gospels, they describe life and events still being

lived under the Old Covenant since it was still in effect until fulfilled by Jesus' death on the cross.

After that comes the book of **Acts**. It tells us about the beginning of the New Testament church here on earth. This is where you will find most examples of conversion and being added by God to Christ's church.

Next comes the largest group of books, twenty-one in all. These are letters written to the various churches, or individuals in the churches, to help them better understand how to serve God and how to treat one another in a godly way.

The final book is called **Revelation**. It talks in figurative terms about both the challenges to come for the church and the ultimate victory we have in Christ. It also provides a beautiful description of heaven.

The Bible tells us it contains everything we need to know to both please God and have a good life

on this earth. As Christians, we study the scriptures, sometimes daily, to try to better understand how God, our creator, wants us, the created, to live. We know he loves us and wants the very best for us. And it is here, in “the word,” we seek his answers to guide us.

So we can understand it today, the Bible has been translated from the original languages into English. There are hundreds of different translations with one of the earliest and most well-known being the King James Version.

Today, it is good to use a version with modern language that translates word by word to keep the original meaning. The New American Standard and English Standard Versions are both easy to obtain and reliable.

Now, let’s get back to questions about life and salvation finding answers according to the Bible.

2

Eternal Life

One of the most familiar passages in the Bible says, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

“Eternal life!” We like the sound of that—especially when we consider it will take place in heaven where there will be no sorrow or pain or suffering. That sounds very appealing.

In the end, our goal as Christians is to have that eternal life and to help as many other people as we can to have it too. But our goal is not *just* about “in the end.”

It is also about “until then” and “right now.” Jesus addressed that as well. He told us in John’s gospel that he *“came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”* (John 10:10)

He was talking about having the abundant life now; a life of joy and peace and love, in spite of the problems we face on a daily basis. God's love for us isn't just for after we die.

So how **does** one sign up for this abundant life and the eternal life to follow? Keep reading and you will hear about God's gift to us and what you need to do to take hold of it.

*While we will focus on '**Eternal Life**', to be complete, it is also right to mention the Bible also talks about 'eternal death' for those who refuse to accept God's wonderful gift. Thank you for seeking God and the better alternative!*

3

In the Beginning

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He also created people, starting with Adam and Eve. You can read all about this in the book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible.

At first, God's relationship with Adam and Eve was perfect, because they trusted him and did everything he asked.

He placed them in an amazing Garden in Eden designed to meet all their physical needs. It was full of all kinds of beautiful trees that were loaded with delicious fruit. Adam's only job in the Garden was to tend it and keep it.

God gave Adam and Eve everything they needed to live and grow and multiply. There was one tree in the Garden they were told to stay away from, a

tree in the middle of the Garden—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Satan (the devil) didn't really like this happy arrangement between God and man so from early on he made it his mission to destroy that relationship. It wasn't long before he tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit, lying to her about what would happen. Eve gave in and even convinced Adam to go along with her in disobeying God.

As a result, God's relationship with man changed. A separation, caused by disobedience, had occurred.

Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, he put them out of the Garden and would not let them return. The reason God did this was so they no longer had access to another special tree in the Garden—the tree of life. From that time forward, their days would be numbered.

God also caused Adam (and mankind in general) to have to work hard in the fields to feed himself and his family. From that point on, thorns and thistles grew up from the ground, adding to the difficulties man would experience.

God also made childbearing very painful for Eve and all mothers to follow.

The perfect paradise was gone. There was now separation from God because of sin. Pain and suffering would now be part of life. But God's love for Adam and Eve didn't change, it was still there for them and all their descendants. He longed to restore the broken relationship between himself and man but because of his nature, sin could not be ignored.

The penalty for sin is death, spiritual separation from God, but reconciliation is possible if ever there was one who lived a perfect life and paid the price for sin.

Over time, Adam and Eve and their descendants populated the earth. The history of these early people and a record of the devastation caused by sin is found in the first chapters of Genesis.

As you continue to read in Genesis and Exodus, you will find God looked after a certain race of people, one that started out small and grew throughout the years.

4

God's Chosen People

The Patriarchs (Fathers)

Though there were several key figures in those early days, one of the main ones was a man named **Abraham**. Abraham was known as a man of faith (strong belief that motivates action) because he trusted God completely even in the face of very difficult situations.

Because of his great faith, God promised Abraham his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, and through his seed (a child), all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Though Abraham didn't understand it at the time, the child by which this global blessing would come was Jesus.

At the time this promise was made, Abraham and his wife Sarah didn't have any children and they were long past the natural years of childbearing. Yet, by God's power, they were enabled to eventually have a son, Isaac, who later had two sons of his own, Esau and Jacob.

Jacob (and his son, Joseph)

Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, had twelve sons. Jacob favored his second youngest son, Joseph, which made the older brothers jealous.

When Joseph was 17 years old, the brothers sold him to some slave traders who were passing through on their way to Egypt.

Joseph didn't forget his God while he stayed in Egypt and continued to serve and honor him. After many years and a series of events Joseph was elevated to a position of leadership and power in Egypt. Joseph predicted, with God's

help in interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, there would soon be seven years of plentiful harvests followed by seven years of severe famine.

God was clearly with Joseph so Pharaoh (the king) put him in charge of storing up the grain during the good years to prepare for the hard times that would follow. When the famine arrived, Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of distributing the grain to the people.

The Egyptians were not the only ones who were experiencing the famine. People from neighboring lands did as well. When Joseph's father, Jacob, heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent his sons to buy some for his growing family.

When the brothers got to Egypt to buy grain, they didn't recognize Joseph their brother. Joseph, however, did recognize his brothers, but he harbored no bitterness toward them. He understood it was God who had sent him ahead into Egypt to preserve his family's life.

Joseph eventually revealed himself to his brothers and was soon joyfully reunited with his father.

The famine would continue for several more years so Joseph convinced his father to move the whole family to Egypt where their needs could be met.

Jacob's family prospered in Egypt growing over a period of 400 years to several hundred thousand or more. As they grew, after the death of Joseph and the Egyptian leaders who knew him, these 'children of Israel' began to worry the Egyptian rulers.

Out of fear of being overthrown by this growing nation, the Egyptians decided to enslave them to keep them under control.

When the Egyptians became very oppressive, the children of Israel cried out to God for help. God heard their cry and responded by sending **Moses** to tell Pharaoh to "Let my people go!"

Pharaoh did not want to lose his workforce of slaves so did not listen to Moses until he suffered through ten plagues sent by God. The tenth plague, the death of every first-born son in Egypt, convinced Pharaoh he needed to do what God said.

Foolishly, Pharaoh changed his mind, after they had been released, and sent his army to bring them back.

Pharaoh was no match for God. The children of Israel were trapped by the Red Sea, so God parted the waters allowing his people to cross to the other side on dry land. When the Egyptian army followed, God let the water return to its normal place and the Egyptian soldiers all drowned.

You can read all about this incredible event in the book of Exodus.

Ten Commandments

God's desire was to lead the children of Israel from Egypt to the land he had promised to give to the descendants of Abraham. On the way, the people stopped at Mount Sinai where Moses was given the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments.

God told Moses about many other laws, memorial feasts, sacrifices and rituals that the children of Israel were to obey and to perform during this time under the old covenant.

Unfortunately, they did not always obey the laws perfectly—they were, after all, people just like we are!

When the people first reached the Promised Land, they were frightened by the land's current occupants so rebelled against God refusing to enter. As punishment for this rebellion, God

caused the people to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

The old covenant required the offering of sacrifices, per God's direction, to seek his forgiveness. While the offering of animal sacrifices was intended to remind the people of sin, the blood of animals was not able to take away their sins.

The children of Israel, in their tribes, were eventually able to occupy the promised land and settled in Canaan. You can read about this systematic occupation of the land in the book of Joshua. This land became the Kingdom of Israel.

The Kingdom of Judah

Some years later there was a major division in the Kingdom. The ten northern tribes split off from, Judah and Benjamin (the two southern tribes). These northern tribes quickly departed from God's law, setting up their capital in Samaria and

worshiping idols rather than the true God in heaven.

These tribes took the name Kingdom of Israel and eventually, because of their refusal to repent of their sins, were taken captive by Assyria.

Judah and Benjamin, the southern union, became known as the Kingdom of Judah with their capital being the city of Jerusalem. It was from the Kingdom of Judah, that Jesus eventually descended.

Unfortunately, the Kingdom of Judah also abandoned God and began worshiping foreign gods and idols. Therefore, God used the Babylonians to carry them off into captivity and to destroy the temple.

After seventy years in Babylon, some of the Jews were encouraged to return to the Holy Land—to Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple and the city—with a renewed appreciation for obedience.

They no longer worshiped foreign gods and idols and adhered strictly to the written Law.

Over time the leaders of the people became fanatical rule-keepers who even believed sickness and poverty were evidence of sin. This belief created a significant rift between the Jewish leaders and the common people.

These same leaders pompously paraded external signs of their religion while ignoring the importance of helping people. While they knew the scriptures and the ancient prophecies, they did not understand what they meant, or to whom they were pointing.

Unfortunately, because of their preconceived ideas about God and his nature, the Jewish leaders resisted the changes about to take place.

While they longed for freedom and a return to the glory days of old, they missed the Messiah the

one who came to set them free and give them blessing after blessing.

Please don't let any past understanding about God or previous experiences with those claiming to be his church keep you from freedom and the blessings God desires to give you!

5

Jesus

When the time was right, and according to what was foretold about him, Jesus was born of a virgin, Mary. The Holy Spirit, who is also God, was his true father. So, Jesus was both the son of God and, at the same time, the son of “man.”

At the young age of twelve Jesus amazed the biblical scholars with his knowledge and understanding of their law. When Jesus reached the age of thirty, he began his ministry on earth. The purpose of his ministry was to do whatever was necessary to enable the restoration of the relationship between man and God.

Even though the Old Testament had prophesied of a savior, the messiah, who was to come, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day refused to recognize Jesus as that messiah.

They viewed him as a troublemaker who was continually challenging and disrupting their long-held religious beliefs. He participated with common people and even *'ate with sinners'*. In their eyes he was a disruptive force that needed to be stopped—at any cost.

Jesus was uncompromising in obeying God and setting an example of righteous living. He constantly challenged the religious elite who talked one way and lived another. He challenged those who were more interested in keeping a set of religious rules and regulations than in showing love to God and to their fellow man.

Jesus' life—His message—was so radically different from anything that had ever been lived or taught that he changed their world. He can change your world as well.

Instead of teaching “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” he taught, *“Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the*

right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew 5:39)

Instead of teaching, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,” he taught, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*” (Matthew 5:44)

Instead of parading his righteousness in front of people, Jesus taught, “*whoever would be great among you must be your servant.*” (Matthew 20:26)

He believed and taught what has come to be known as the golden rule, that is, “*So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.*” (Matthew 7:12)

Jesus was humble and taught his disciples to be humble. One example of this was when he showed them how much he loved them by washing their feet, normally the job of a servant. (John 13:1-17)

In a similar way his disciples taught people to serve others and to *“not think of himself more highly than he ought to think”*, but *“in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”* (Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:3)

His disciples taught his followers to treat poor people with just as much respect and love as they did the rich people. (James 2:1-7)

Jesus never practiced his religion with an attitude of trying to impress others with respect to how righteous he was. His whole purpose was to seek and save the lost and to bring glory and honor to his father in heaven. (Matthew 6:1; Luke 19:10; John 14:13)

Jesus came and showed, by his life and teachings, God wants more from someone than just a willingness to keep a set of rules. He wants our hearts. He wants our love—for him and for our fellow man. Only then can we live a fulfilling life.

Jesus lived this ministry for three years, then, as had been prophesied, when he was thirty-three years old, the religious leaders of his day crucified him—they nailed him to a cross. Nails in his hands and feet and a spear to his side resulted in the flow of blood and water while he hung on the cross.

Can you imagine that? The most educated and outwardly religious people of his day were unable to see the true messiah. They were blinded by their own desires for an earthy kingdom where they would be important.

This is a valuable lesson. Just because someone is outwardly religious doesn't mean he or she is godly or right. It is important we understand **how the Bible describes those who are pleasing to God**. People cannot save themselves no matter how 'good' or 'religious' they are. Never forget that. It's still true today.

After his death, Jesus was wrapped in burial clothes and laid in a borrowed tomb. But the story didn't end there. Three days later, early on the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the dead. He appeared to his disciples and to more than five hundred people.

After spending forty days showing himself to people and encouraging his disciples, Jesus ascended back into heaven to prepare a place for those who would believe in him.

When the time is right (only God knows the day) Jesus will return from heaven to take those who have been faithfully following God's word, back to heaven with him.

At that time, everything physical will be destroyed, and every person who ever lived will be given their spiritual reward or punishment.

6

Salvation

Before ascending back into heaven, Jesus spoke with his apostles. These were men he had specially selected to carry on his work after his ascension back into heaven. He instructed them to go to Jerusalem and wait.

While they were waiting in Jerusalem, during the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon them and gave them power to do miracles, to speak in languages they had never studied, and to preach the word about Jesus and his church.

It was on this memorable Sunday that Peter, one of the apostles, told the gathered crowd about the fulfillment of prophecy and how it proved this Jesus, the one they had just crucified, was the son of God.

Listen to the words of Peter:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter said to them, “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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:36-41)

The Beginning of the Church

Did you notice what the Bible says? Those convicted of their sin, who committed to follow Jesus and confessed he is the son of God, were immersed in water. Those who **believed** were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and were saved from the spiritual consequences of sin.

Then, according to Acts 2:47, God added those who were being saved to the one church.

God's plan had come to completion. His son had paid the price for sin, and when a person accepts that gift, he is reconciled (made right) with God.

While we didn't eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil back in the Garden, we are just as guilty, and just as separated from God, when we sin. We may not have been in the crowd shouting "crucify him" but it was just as much our sin that held him to the cross as those religious rulers who turned him over to the Romans.

The Bible confirms we are all sinners, every one of us. But the Bible also confirms every one of us can be reconciled, restored back to God, as well. We can do this by becoming and living as Christians— children of God.

How to Become a Christian

To do so we must truly **believe** and **confess** Jesus is the Christ, the son of God (Romans 10:9-10). We must **repent** of, which means to turn away from, our sins, and be **baptized** in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point we will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and God adds us to his one church (Acts 2:38-47). It is then, we are prepared to live the Christian life as a disciple of Jesus. It's that simple.

When to Become a Christian

Some people hesitate to become Christians because they feel like they don't know enough

about what the Bible teaches. They think they need to wait until they know a lot of scripture first.

But the truth is most baptisms in the Bible took place after very little teaching—some after one sermon. The Bible refers to new Christians as *“newborn infants”* and tells them to *“long for the pure spiritual milk (the word), that by it you may grow up into salvation.”* (1 Peter 2:2)

Just as with newborn babies, much of the learning and growing takes place after the birth/baptism, not before.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus told his followers to spread the good news about salvation from sins. Here he told them to “make disciples”, baptizing them and teaching them.

A disciple is like an apprentice, one who sticks close to and learns from the master and is committed to becoming like the master.

These are the people Jesus is seeking to be part of his church, people committed to be like Jesus.

You need to know and believe the basic principles about Jesus as stated in the paragraphs above and be committed to do what he has asked of his followers.

Some people hesitate to become Christians because they don't feel like they are good enough yet. They want to wait until they've gotten their life under better control before they take that giant step.

These are noble thoughts, but they miss the point. The truth is you will never be good enough—no matter how hard you try. You will be waiting for the impossible, because you can never, ever, in a million years, be good enough, on your own, to deserve to be saved or to go to heaven. It can happen only by obeying God and because of His grace.

The whole point is Jesus loved you so much he was willing to come and to die in your place. When you believe, repent, confess and are baptized, your sins become his sins and his purity becomes your purity.

Your baptism—going down into the water, being immersed, and being raised up again—is a participation in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection because by faith you understand Jesus is the only way to God. It is in baptism the old *evil* self and all our sins are put to death and we are raised to a new life where we live to be transformed to be like Jesus.

It is in baptism we ‘put on Christ’ and when we are ‘in Christ’ we have access to all the blessings God promised for his people.

You are made clean by the blood of Jesus and from that day forward his blood/sacrifice continually washes away your sins, when you live for him.

We talked about God's grace a moment ago. A little more needs to be said about that and about God's mercy, as well.

They are both very important.

7

Grace and Mercy

Grace

Grace means “unmerited favor.” It means God gives us a gift (of eternal life) we don’t deserve, and we cannot earn. The gift is available to everyone who *chooses* to believe in him and obey him.

Since we can’t earn it and since it is a gift from God, we must always and continually give the glory to God for saving us.

It’s not that God needs the glory or the praise. *He’s God!* It’s that, as our creator, he knows our most fulfilling, peaceful, loving, abundant life can be lived only if we are humble and grateful to him for our blessings.

If we are prideful, thinking we don’t need salvation, or can accomplish it on our own, then

we undermine the things that would bring us true joy, and will die in our sins.

Mercy

Mercy means not getting the punishment we *do* deserve—in this case, the eternal punishment and separation from God warranted by our sin.

When Jesus died for us, he took on our sins and in fact became sin for us. He paid the price for our sin, so God's justice was satisfied. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he overcame Satan for good. He became victorious over death, and Satan, forever.

You now have the opportunity to join him in that victory if you will just believe in him, confess his name, repent of your sins, and participate in his death, burial and resurrection in baptism, being raised again in newness of life. You have been given the opportunity to be a child of God. Don't miss out on this wonderful blessing.

8

After Baptism

Then what? What happens after baptism? That's a good question! We're glad you asked.

As newborn babes, we need nurturing. We need family. We need love. All those things are necessary to help us to continually grow into mature, spiritually minded children of God. Becoming '*Christlike*' is a lifelong process.

This transformation is next to impossible to do without assembling with other Christians who are farther down the road of Christian maturity than any new Christian would be. We need nurturers. And that's where "church" comes into play.

The Fellowship

When the first people were baptized in Acts 2 it was the beginning of Jesus' church. These new

Christians realized they were renewed and needed to live in a way that demonstrated the blessings they realized in Christ. Acts 2:42 tells us they *“devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*

Most understand the purpose of study, prayer and communion (“the Lord’s Supper”), however, **the fellowship** may be new.

“The fellowship” is a term used to describe the relationship and partnership between Christians. It means all Christians have a common purpose and desire. It means we take care of each other both physically and emotionally.

Fellowship also means we communicate with each other and with God. This comes in the form of studying together and worshiping together. It happens because we are members of Christ’s body, the church.

9

The Church

The word “*church*” roughly means the assembled, those called out for a specific purpose. It’s used in the broadest sense in that there is only one church— the one the Lord adds you to when you are baptized. This is a work of God and not man.

In a more specific sense, we also use the word “church” to talk about a smaller group of believers, a congregation of disciples, who meet in a local place to encourage one another and to study about God and how to live the Christian life.

People sometimes use the word “church” to designate a building, but that’s not really the church. That’s a “church building.” The real church is the people, the disciples, the Christians. Therefore, church isn’t someplace we go, it is who we are.

Finding the “Right Church”

As a new Christian, it is important to worship God and learn about his desires for you with a congregation of Christians who endeavor to follow God’s word as their only source of authority. There are a couple of things to keep in mind in that regard.

Remember what we talked about before. Just because someone is outwardly religious doesn’t mean he or she is right. Only by following God’s word are we disciples of Christ.

Listen to what Jesus has to say: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you;*

depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”
(Matthew 7:21-23)

It is critical you fellowship with a group of people who above all else strive to live the will of God, and not just follow tradition. You need people who encourage you to be more like Christ every day; and rely on the Bible for direction.

This is not to say you will find a church with zero problems. There are positive and negative things about every group of people. And there are wonderful loving people in most ‘churches’.

So how do you find a Bible based congregation? Let’s look in the Bible for the answer.

Love

The Bible says, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35)*. In another place Jesus said the greatest commandment is to *“love the Lord*

your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-40). Based on these verses, the first thing to look for in a church is the believers' love for God and for one another (including you).

Bible Study

Another key to watch for is how much church members study and rely on God's word, the Bible, in determining what they believe. Some groups of people talk about "The Bible says this or that" but they don't encourage you to read it for yourself. Remember, knowing what it says is one thing, but blessing comes when we "*do what it says*".

Be firm in asking, "Where does the Bible say that? Show me." If they tell you, then make sure you look it up and study for yourself. If they are not sure or are unwilling to help you look, it may be a sign they don't really look to God's word for the truth.

Prayer

Another help is to pray fervently for God to show you the way. Prayer is you talking to God—thanking him for all he has done and asking him for guidance.

Ask him to help you find a congregation that is pleasing to him. Ask him to guide you and to help you grow personally. Ask him for wisdom. He has promised to grant that request, if you trust him to provide it. (James 1:5)

Leadership

The church, as described in the Bible, is governed at the congregational level by ‘Elders’, men who have met Biblical qualifications and proven their service over time to meet spiritual needs.

Deacons are men who also meet Biblical qualifications intended to help them serve the physical needs of the congregation.

A Minister serves the congregation bringing lessons from the Bible to encourage members. He is not a 'Pastor' or 'Reverend' or 'Father'.

Worship

Worship is about praising God. Yet, at the same time, it is about encouraging each other and building up every member.

In a healthy congregation you will be encouraged to participate. This includes singing together, not for entertainment, but to teach and strengthen each other. As appropriate, participation also includes leading prayer, preparing devotional talks, and teaching Bible classes.

You will be encouraged to attend worship services in person, not remotely or online after the fact (although these do serve a purpose). Only by being together can we truly serve each other, care for each other, and know what is needed to be genuinely loving.

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Summary

So, now you know and have a choice to make.

Do you believe the message as described herein?
Or, does the alternative, you are here on this earth, completely by chance, with no specific purpose, seem more reasonable to you?

Even avoiding the question all together is making a decision, a decision to ignore the message from God for you. It is after all a choice only you can make for yourself.

The message of the good news about Jesus is overall a simple one.

If you are willing to commit your life to God by becoming a disciple of Jesus, being his apprentice, with a goal of becoming like him, then he will welcome you.

This means you have heard the word of God.
(Romans 10:17)

You believe Jesus is God's son who lived on the earth and died for you (John 8:24), and after three days was raised from the dead.

You are sorry for sin (disobeying God) and you are turning away from any sin (repenting) as you become aware of it, doing good things in its place.
(Acts 17:30-31)

You are not ashamed of your faith in Jesus and willingly confess your belief in him by word and action. (Mathew 10:32-33)

If these are all true, then you are invited to be baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of sin and as a result God will add you to the church. (Acts 2:38, 47)

With your baptism God gives you a gift, the Holy Spirit, to live in you to help on your journey as a Christian.

You are now ready to begin living as a Christian, forgiven of sin, learning more about God's plan for you, fellowshiping with other Christians and worshiping God in joy.

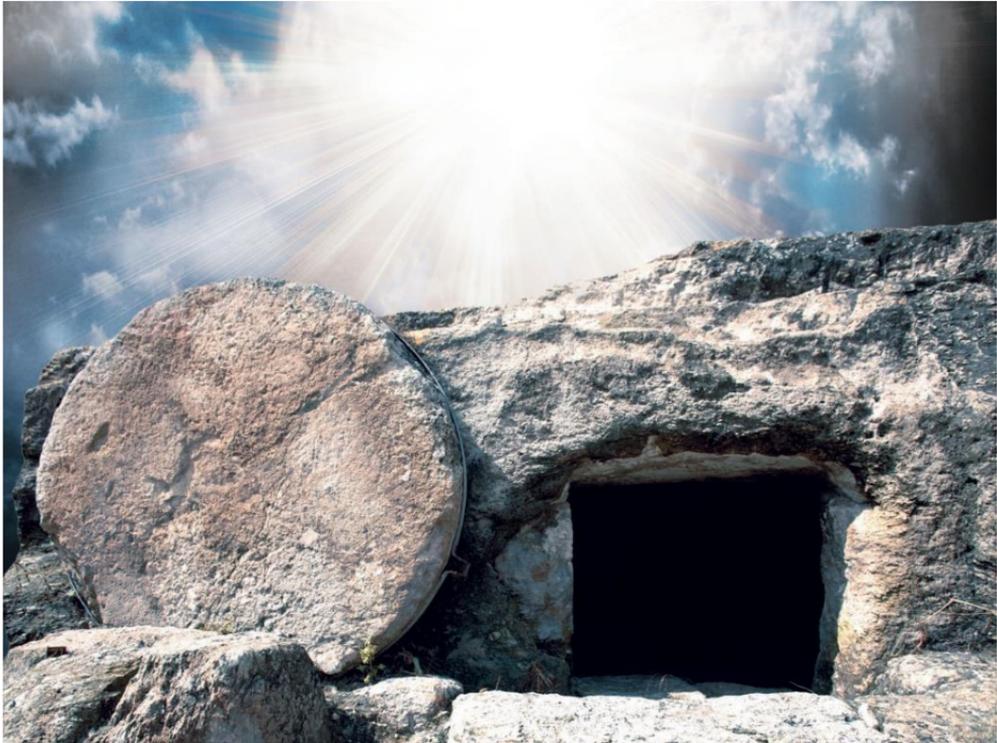
We know there is power in God's word. We pray you will allow it to have power in your life as well.

May God bless you.

Notes:

Scripture Text paraphrased or quoted from the
English Standard Version – esv.org

Often the Cross is used as a symbol of Faith and represents the price that was paid for our sin.



However, the Empty Tomb is what makes our life in Christ and promise of Eternal Life possible.

We serve a RISEN, LIVING SAVIOR!