

How to Get a Fresh Start with God

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I am so excited about your decision to trust Jesus Christ as your Savior! This is the first step of a long journey with Christ. The following is a Bible study to help you better understand this relationship that has begun between the Lord and you. Please take your time reading through this study. In it you will find an explanation of what it means to be a Christian and what you should do now that you are a Christian to help you to continue to grow. If while reading over the study you have any questions whatsoever, please don't hesitate to contact us!

You are beginning life's most satisfying adventure – your walk with God! As you start this adventure, here's what God says to you:

***Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be —
you get a fresh start, your slate's wiped clean.***

Psalm 32:1 (The Message)

When you make a commitment of your life to Jesus, not only is your “slate wiped clean”, you also get a “fresh start” – a new lease on life. This study is designed to help you have a good start with your fresh start.

This study will provide you with the basics to begin walking with God. It is the primer for future study. You will soon be invited to attend a class called Fresh Start and after that you will see other classes that are provided by the church that will help you to deepen your faith and continue your walk with the Lord.

FORGIVENESS – *Accepting God's Grace*

Jesus said, *"There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to Me."* Luke 24:47 (NLT)

Why do we need forgiveness?

Luke tells us about an intriguing incident that happened while Jesus was having dinner one day at Simon the Pharisee's house. It was a common practice in Middle Eastern culture that during a dinner like this one, the house was open to anyone. Sometime during the meal, a woman came into the house, a woman who had a reputation around town. Jesus was at the table in typical fashion, leaning on one arm, eating with the other, His feet extended behind Him when she came in and walked toward Him.

This woman's life had been changed by Jesus, she had discovered a fresh start, Jesus had given her a reason for living, and out of her deep and uncontrollable gratitude she began to cry and her tears fell on the feet of Jesus...feet that were dirty and dusty from the walk over to Simon's place. She immediately began to dry Jesus' feet with her hair, never noticing that her tears, mixed with the dust on His feet meant mud in her hair, and when she had dried them, she started kissing them, and poured perfume on the feet of Jesus.

Simon just didn't understand, he just didn't get it. So, Jesus told Simon a story about two men who were in debt, different amounts, one owed the creditor an amount equal to five hundred days' pay and the other fifty days' pay, but neither of them could pay their debt, so the debtor forgave them both.

Then Jesus asked Simon an interesting question, "...which of them will love him more?" And Simon answered, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." Jesus said, "You have judged correctly," then He explained to Simon about the depth of this woman's love because her huge debt had been canceled, paid. Then Jesus turned to her and said, "Your sins are forgiven." Wow! She had been carrying such a burden, such a load of guilt and shame because of who she was in town and what she had done. And with one short statement, Jesus lifts all that burden, all that shame, all that guilt off of her and sets her free. She knew the gift of forgiveness...a fresh start!

And we need to know that gift too. Here's why...

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both." Luke 7:41-42 (NIV)

1. Because we are in debt!

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty." Luke 7:41

A denarius was equal to one day's wage. Although the amount of their debts were significantly different, the fact is...they were both still in debt.

Spiritually, all of us are in debt, some of us are a lot deeper in debt than others. Some people have stretched the truth, others have created lies. Some people have lusted, others have had affairs. Some people have

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cheated on their taxes, others have robbed a bank. Some people have driven 1 mile per hour over the speed limit, others don't realize a speed limit exists. Some people do just enough to get by on their jobs, others get paid for what they never do. You get the point, it's simply a question of **degree** of debt; it's not whether or not we're in debt.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:8 (NIV)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23 (NIV)

The glory of the Lord, the glory of God, is Jesus. And if Jesus was standing here right now, not one of us would measure up very well to Him. That's what the Bible means when it tells us we have all sinned and because of that sin we fall short of the glory of God. We're in debt, we don't measure up.

Falling short of the glory of God means, I don't measure up to Jesus.

2. Because we are in debt over our heads!

"Neither of them had the money to pay him back...." Luke 7:42

Under the Roman law of Jesus' day, the creditor could have seized both of these men who couldn't pay and had them jailed or forced them to go to work for him. The idea was to force the debtor to sell whatever property he might have to help liquidate the debt, or to force the debtor's friends and relatives to pay off the debt, or to apply the value of the debtor's labor against the debt.

Whenever the debtor couldn't pay the debt...he was in over his head, and at great risk. Let's apply the biblical story to us...spiritually we're in over our heads.

The sin debt we owe to God is beyond our ability to repay. We can't work hard enough, pray diligently enough, give abundantly enough, or live rightly enough to pay our debt. God knew that and He gave us both Christmas (that means God sent Jesus to us) and the cross (that means Jesus died in our place) so that we could do something about our debt. He saw that we were spiritually bankrupt, and if we just tried to reorganize our lives, file a spiritual bankruptcy form, we would fail. We needed our debt forgiven, paid, and his answer was Jesus.

For the wages of sin is death.... Romans 6:23 (NIV)

The sin debt that we owe God is beyond our ability to repay.

Why do we need forgiveness?

3. Because we cannot cancel our own debt!

The end of verse 42 tells us, "...so he canceled the debts of both." That's what Jesus did on the cross, He canceled, He paid my debt, and He paid yours.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

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Christ's death was ... a one-time event, but it was a sacrifice that took care of sins forever.
Hebrews 9:28 (The Message)

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. Ephesians 1:7 (NIV)

When you are willing to give, really give your life to Jesus and let His death on the cross be the price paid for your sins, to stop trying to do it on your own and start trusting what Jesus did for you, then you are forever forgiven, that's God's gift to you – THAT'S CALLED GRACE!

What is God's grace?

*You are a God of **forgiveness, gracious and merciful**, slow to become angry, and full of **unfailing love and mercy**.* Nehemiah 9:17 (NLT)

Grace has been described as unmerited favor. That means: something for nothing.

Most of us have a hard time believing this is possible, especially with God. So, we try to earn His forgiveness. The reality is, forgiveness does have a price, it's just that **Jesus has already paid it**.

Grace is:

God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense

*In this man Jesus there is forgiveness of your sins. Everyone who believes in Him is **freed from all guilt** and declared right with God.* Acts 13:38-39 (NLT)

1. **Grace is a free gift.**

Many people think that they're saved by works like going to church, giving to charities, getting baptized, by earning their way to heaven, by being good enough that God says, "OK, come on in."

If you were to do a sidewalk survey of 100 people and just ask, "How do you get to heaven?" you'd get a lot of different answers. But basically they would all be summarized by, "You've got to earn your way to heaven." You'd hear things like, "The way you get to heaven is you try to be good and do your best" or "Work real hard at being good or just try to be a good, moral person" or "Do more good things in life than you do bad things in life and if your good pile is higher than your bad pile, God's going to say, 'You're a good guy. Come on in.'" It's all based on works, not grace.

You need to understand that God says here that salvation is absolutely free. You don't work for a gift....or it wouldn't be a gift. God says salvation is absolutely free. You can't earn it, you can't buy it, you can't work for it....it's a gift.

*All of us need to be made right with God by His grace, which is a **free gift**...through Jesus Christ. Romans 3:24 (NCV)*

Religion is spelled **D-O**, but Christianity is spelled **D-O-N-E!**

This is the fundamental difference between Christianity and every other religion. Every other faith, every other belief system, whatever it is... if it's Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses...you pick, but if it's anything other than Christianity it is based on works and you can summarize them in one word -- "do". There are certain things you **do** in order to gain God's approval.

On the other hand, if you were to summarize Christianity in one word, it's the word "done". It's already been done for you. It was done on the cross and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There isn't anything you can do to save yourself. You just accept God's free gift of grace.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – **not by works**, so that no one can boast.*

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

2. Jesus is the only one who can give grace.

*... **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.** John 1:17 (NCV)*

*...many people received God's gift of life by the grace of the **one man, Jesus Christ.** Romans 5:15 (NCV)*

*Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except **through Me.**" John 14:6 (NIV)*

Why through Jesus Christ? Why is Jesus Christ the only way to heaven? Why not Buddha? Why not somebody else?

Because He paid the price of admission. On the cross, He paid for your sins and through the resurrection proved He is the Son of God.

He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5 (NIV)

*God made **Christ**, who never sinned, to **be the offering for our sin**, so that we could be made right with God through Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)*

The Bible teaches that when I commit my life to Jesus, that I am "in Christ." Once I am "in Christ", when the Father looks at me with eyes of grace, all He can see is the perfection of His Son Jesus.

3. Grace is available to anyone and everyone, including me.

*The promise is not only for those people that live under the law of Moses. It is for **anyone** who lives with faith like Abraham. Romans 4:16 (ICB)*

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Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Romans 10:13 (NIV)

4. Grace lasts forever.

*The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is **eternal life** through Christ Jesus our Lord.* Romans 6:23 (NLT)

*Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given **a brand-new life** and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future **starts now!*** 1 Peter 1:3-4 (The Message)

5. I can have eternal life, by accepting it.

If you're offered a gift and you don't accept it, it's a worthless gift. You need to realize that Jesus Christ makes this eternal grace gift available to everybody but it has to be accepted.

How do you accept it? By believing, by faith! God's gift is received by faith. I trust that what Jesus did on the cross and through the resurrection is enough.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through **faith** – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

*People **receive** God's **promise** by having **faith**. This happens so that the promise can be a free gift.* Romans 4:16 (NCV)

Salvation is not based on my performance; it is based on God's promise.

Salvation is not based on my goodness; it is based on God's grace.

I'll get to heaven, not based on my merit, but based on God's mercy.

How does a person accept God's grace and get the gift of forgiveness?

The Bible makes this promise: *Everyone who **believes** in Him **receives forgiveness** of sins through His name.* Acts 10:43 (NIV)

In the Bible, the word "believe" means more than just brain knowledge, it means "to make a commitment to." So, everyone who makes a commitment to live the rest of their life for Jesus, accepting the price that He paid for their sins on the cross, receives forgiveness.

Many people have come to Christ, had their sins forgiven, invited Him into their life by saying a prayer similar to this one:

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God forgive me for all of my sins and come into my heart and life. I believe, with all I understand, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God...and God, I believe with all I understand that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He paid for my sins. And, with all I understand I believe He rose from the dead. Right now, I'm saying 'come in' to Jesus. I'm trusting Him to forgive my sins and give me eternal life. Thank You for the fresh start You are giving me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."

When you pray that prayer, you are doing four things:

1. Admitting you have sinned.
2. Believing that Jesus died to pay for your sins.
3. Accepting God's free gift of salvation by grace.
4. Inviting Jesus to come into your life.

Have you ever done that yourself? Have you ever prayed a prayer like that from your heart admitting that you are a sinner, believing that Jesus died to pay for your sins, accepting God's free gift of salvation and inviting Jesus to come into your life? If not, why not do that right now! Stop right now and pray that prayer and invite Jesus to save you from your sins. When you do the Bible tells us what happens next...

What If I Sin After Accepting God's Forgiveness?

*There is **no one** on earth who does what is right all the time and never makes a mistake.*
Ecclesiastes 7:20 (TEV)

When we make mistakes, or sin, God does not want us to give up and quit trying to live like Christ. That's our natural tendency. But God has another idea. When you sin you don't lose the forgiveness that God gave you. You simply need to maintain your relationship with God by regularly confessing sins in your life. When you sin follow the guidelines of the following verses:

1. Admit I have failed.

*We **all stumble** in many ways.* James 3:2 (NIV)

*For everybody has sinned and everybody **continues** to come short of God's glory.*
Romans 3:23 (WMS)

2. Ask God for forgiveness.

*If we **confess our sins** to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.* 1 John 1:9 (NLT)

I'm a Christian, Now What?

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You've been brought near to God, let's take a look at how we can build that relationship. What follows are keys that will help you to start growing in your relationship with God right away! God doesn't want to just forgive you of your sins, he wants to give you a fresh start! So, you are starting something new by coming into relationship with Him. I want to tell you how you can start developing a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

*In the past you were without Christ...and you had no part in the promises that God made to His people. You had no hope, and you did not know God. But now you belong to Christ Jesus. Though you once were far away from God, now you have been **brought near to Him** because of the blood of Christ.* Ephesians 2:12-13 (NCV/NLT)

How To Develop Your Relationship with God

*... He is a God who is **passionate about His relationship with you.***

Exodus 34:14 (NLT)

*A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a **rich relationship with God.***

Luke 12:21 (NLT)

1. Attending a Good Church Every Week.

Why is it important to attend church? Can't I be a Christian without attending church? God is the one who came up with the idea of church. It is important that Believers in Christ attend church because they will be with others who are trying to live for the Lord too! At church you have opportunities to:

1. Worship

Sing songs from your heart to Christ. Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:19-20 (The Message)

*Praise the LORD. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens. Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness. Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise Him with the harp and lyre, praise Him with tambourine and dancing, praise Him with the strings and flute, praise Him with the clash of cymbals, praise Him with resounding cymbals. **Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.** Praise the Lord. Psalm 150 (NIV)*

2. Hear the Word of God taught

Make them pure and holy by teaching them Your words of truth.

John 17:17 (NLT)

2. Spending Time Praying Every Day.

What is prayer?

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Prayer is talking to God and listening to God.

When we pray we will experience God's presence and power.

Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)

3. Reading God's Word (the Bible) Every Day

Why is reading the Bible important to my life?

Studying the Bible will help me think right, and when I think right, I have the equipment to live right!

How can I get the most from my Bible?

Engage in biblical aerobics.

The Bible is basic equipment.

*It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully **equipped** for every good thing God wants us to do. 2 Timothy 3:17 (NLT)*

Physicians and others say to develop and maintain a healthy heart, one must do an aerobic exercise 4-5 days a week a minimum of 20 minutes per session. What if we adopted a similar strategy for our souls...biblical aerobics. Reading the Bible 4-5 days per week for 20 minutes at a time.

Soak my mind and life with it.

***Fix** these words of mine in your **hearts** and **minds**; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you **lie down** and when you **get up**. Deuteronomy 11:18-19 (NIV)*

We do this by memorizing God's word. All of us can memorize scripture, and the benefit is that when you need a word from God the most, the right scripture will come to mind. It's worth your time!

Live what you learn.

*Remember, it is **a message to obey**, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. James 1:22 (NLT)*

4. Being Baptized

*For we died and were buried with Christ by **baptism**. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live **new lives**.*

Romans 6:4 (NLT)

What is baptism?

1. An outward sign of an inward change.

*Those who become Christians become **new persons**. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!*

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

When we make a commitment of our lives to Jesus Christ there is a transformation that takes place. It might not be seen immediately, but it happens. It's a heart deal. Your heart changes, you really are a new creation. When you are baptized, as you go beneath the water, it pictures your old life being gone, and when you're raised out of the water, it pictures that your new life has come.

2. An act of obedience.

*Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)*

Baptism is a tremendous act of obedience. It's something you do because Jesus said that we are to do it. We're showing God and others, right from the beginning, that we are going to do our best to obey what Jesus says. And it has such a powerful meaning to you!

In Matthew 28, the Great Commission, Jesus instructed His followers to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here's why: You will be baptized in the name of the Father because God could not imagine heaven without you. You will be baptized in the name of the Son because Jesus had you on His heart while He hung on the cross. And you will be baptized in the name of the Spirit because God by His Spirit lives in you to help you and empower you as you live for Jesus every day!

3. A picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

*...Christ **died** for our sins...was **buried**...and He was **raised** from the dead.... 1 Corinthians 5:3-4 (NLT)*

What is the biblical pattern of baptism?

We want, in our practices as a church, to be as close as possible to the patterns we find in the Bible. That includes how we baptize. When we talk about the biblical pattern of baptism there are two crucial elements.

It always follows belief.

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We know that from studying how the first church did its baptisms. When we look at the early church, there was a clear pattern that developed.

The early church pattern:

- taught
- believed
- baptized

Those who **believed** what **Peter said** were **baptized**....

Acts 2:41 (NLT)

But now the people **believed Philip's message** of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a **result**, many men and women were **baptized**. Acts 8:12 (NLT)

As she **listened** to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she **accepted** what Paul was saying. She was **baptized**.... Acts 16:14b-15 (NLT)

Then they **shared the word of the Lord** with him and all who lived in his household. That same hour the jailer washed their wounds, and he and everyone in his household were immediately **baptized**. Acts 16:32-33 (NLT)

It always is by immersion.

...they went **down into the water**, and Philip **baptized** him. When they **came up out of the water**.... Acts 8:38-39 (NLT)

Baptize literally means to:

- immerse
- dip
- submerge
- plunge

Why should I be baptized?

1. As a demonstration that I will follow the example of Jesus.

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and **he was baptized** by John in the Jordan River. Mark 1:9 (NLT)

2. As a display of my new life in Christ.

For you were **buried with Christ** when you were baptized. And with Him you were **raised to a new life** because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to

Christ's cross. Colossians 2:12-14 (NLT)

3. It's the right step after believing.

*As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. **Why shouldn't I be baptized?**" Acts 8:36 (NIV)*

Isn't that a great question: "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" That's really the right question. "Why should I be baptized?" is a defensive question. When we say, "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" we're saying there's really no reason in the world for me not to be. Or, give me a reason why I shouldn't. The assumption then becomes that I should, and that's the right assumption. Baptism is just the right, logical, next step to take once you believe.

You can check the block on the Communication Card letting us know of your desire to be baptized and we will go over the meaning of baptism in more detail with you and schedule your baptism for date.

Our goal as a church is to help you become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Anything we can do to help you with your spiritual walk we will do. Just let us know if you have any questions at all!

God Bless you as you start your journey with Christ!