

Walking with Christ

Transforming Truths for the Christian Life



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Course Introduction

Walking with Christ is designed to encourage you in your Christian life by presenting truths that are transforming. In this course you will learn more about what it means to depend upon Jesus Christ in your daily life. Trusting in the person of Christ for our salvation is the first step of faith we take that sets us on the path that is the Christian life. This first step is to be followed by many other steps of faith as we deepen our trust in God and his Word.

When we think of the word *walk*, we think of moving along or going in a certain direction. The physical act of walking also has spiritual significance in the Bible. Moses uses the phrase *walking with God* as a metaphor “to describe the intimate relationship which God had enjoyed with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8). Enoch (5:24), Noah (6:9), and Abraham (17:1) all ‘walked with God,’ living in ways that were pleasing to Him.”¹

Walking represents the whole manner of a person’s life and conduct. The Bible frequently contrasts the way in which believers and unbelievers walk. When we believe the Gospel, the truths of the gospel begin to transform us. How do these changes take place in us? How do we become more like Christ? We will explore these questions together in this course.

When we walk, we must lift our back foot and leave the place where we are in order to move ahead. So, it is in the Christian life. We are invited to lift our feet, to leave behind the place where we are, and step out on the path that stretches before us.

As we walk, each step takes us closer to our destination. This is true in our daily walk with Christ; we progress gradually toward the goal of becoming like him. The self that begins the journey with Christ is not the same at the end of the journey. If we stumble somewhere along the way, we do not have to go back to the beginning of our journey and start over again. Christ is there to lift us up and to help us keep moving ahead.

When we begin this walk with Christ, we do not know where it will lead. The road is unknown. But we have the assurance that he walks beside us every step of the way. As you study this course, may you be encouraged to lift your feet, to leave behind the place where you are, and to place your hand each day in the hand of the Savior, who calls you to come ahead and walk with him.

Course Objectives

When you have completed this course, you will be able to

1. demonstrate a renewed desire to deepen your relationship with God by walking in daily dependence on Christ
2. explain the gospel and how one continues to grow as a Christian
3. develop a plan for growing in the areas of God's Word, prayer, stewardship, fellowship, and service
4. outline the role of faith in living the Christian life
5. value and summarize the role of suffering in the development of our faith and spiritual growth
6. design personal plans for evangelizing and discipling others
7. evaluate through journaling or discussion your deepening relationship with God and your growth in Christian character in personal application of the truths presented in this course

Walking with Christ in Relation to the Total Curriculum

Walking with Christ is part of the foundational course of the Entrust curriculum and is used to learn the skills of facilitation. As this workbook centers on the basic truths that believers need to live as a disciple of Christ, we highly recommend that after taking *Facilitating Relational Learning*, participants use *Walking with Christ* as a tool for discipling others. An added benefit is that it will also provide practice for strengthening facilitation skills.

Understanding Icons



Assignment: a question or study that focuses on course content. Written responses are required and are to be recorded in your notebook.



Personal Reflection

Reflections give an opportunity to reflect on scriptural truths or character traits as they relate to your walk with God. The focus is on personal application. A written response is encouraged and may be requested.



Adoration

These instructions are designed to worship the Lord with reference to course content. The focus is on God. No written response is required.

Notes

¹ Paul Wright, editor, *Shepherd's Notes: Genesis* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1997), 25.

Lesson 1:

Christ: Our Solid Foundation

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson, you will be able to

1. explain how one becomes a Christian using the Bible to support your views
2. define grace and explain its results in the believer's life
3. reflect on your life in terms of your understanding of grace and your application of these truths to your Christian experience
4. share with another person how you came to faith in Jesus Christ

Lesson Outline

What Does It Mean to Be a Christian?

The First Christians

Experiencing a Personal Encounter with Christ

The Insurmountable Obstacle

God's Provision for Our Salvation

Understanding Our Need for Salvation

The Cross of Christ

The Resurrection of Christ

God's Grace toward Us

The Uniqueness of Christianity

Receiving the Gift of Salvation

Sharing the Good News with Others

Carlos and Robert were talking late one night. The conversation turned to spiritual matters. Carlos asked Robert how he thought a person can get to heaven or have eternal life.

Robert replied, "Try to live a good life, be kind to others, and do things to help people. Be an honest person."

Next Carlos asked him, "Do you think you will go to heaven?"

Lesson 1 – Christ: Our Solid Foundation

Robert said, “I hope so. I think I’ve done more good things than bad in my life. I give to charity. I don’t steal, and I’ve never murdered anyone. I guess I stand as good a chance as anyone else.”

Robert’s understanding of how to get to heaven is a common view. As we begin this course, we will look at the biblical teaching on what it means to be a Christian and how one gets to heaven.

What Does It Mean to Be a Christian?

Many people only have a vague idea of what it means to be a Christian. Often people assume that, if they believe in God and live a good life, they are Christians.



What do you think it means to be a Christian?

The First Christians

The book of Acts describes the activities of Peter, James, John, and the other disciples as they begin to share the good news of the gospel, starting in Jerusalem and the regions around Palestine. After Paul’s conversion, he takes several missionary journeys to spread the good news in the Middle East and Europe. In Acts 11, we find Paul and Barnabas meeting with new believers at Antioch (present-day Turkey), teaching and grounding them in their faith. It is here that the disciples are first called Christians, which means followers of Christ (see Acts 11:26).

The term Christian soon becomes the title for followers of Christ. When a person believes in Jesus Christ as the one who saves him from his sin, this person is then associated with the very name of Christ. *To live a Christian life means to be a follower of Jesus, associated with, and belonging to him.*

Experiencing a Personal Encounter with Christ

How does one become a Christian? While Jesus lived on earth, he talked to people on every level of society, from the most prominent to the most rejected.

The New Testament records some of these conversations. He wants people to know God personally, and he invites them to understand who he is.

Let us look at three of these encounters.

Jesus' Encounter with a Religious Ruler

In John's gospel, Jesus talks with Nicodemus who is a respected religious teacher and a member of the ruling council in Jerusalem.

1.2

Read John 3:1-20.

- A. Why do you think Nicodemus desires to talk to Jesus?
- B. What do you observe about Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus?
- C. How would you summarize what Jesus says to Nicodemus?

Jesus' Encounter with the Woman at the Well

In the very next chapter, John records Jesus' conversation with an unnamed Samaritan woman. The placement of these two accounts back-to-back emphasizes the contrast between the outwardly righteous Jewish leader and the seemingly immoral Samaritan woman.

The Samaritans are descendants of the Israelites who remain in the promised land when the ten northern tribes of Israel are conquered and go into exile in 722 B.C. They "intermarried with the newly imported alien population," made up of Assyrians (see 2 Kings 17:24; Ezra 4:2,10).¹ The Jews in Jesus' day have no dealings with the Samaritans and view them as traitors. This woman, who is living with a man who is not her husband, is an outcast both to the Jews and to her own people.

1.3

Read John 4:1-30, 39-42.

- A. What do you observe about Jesus' interaction with this woman?
- B. What do you think he meant by living water?
- C. As you read the story, what changes do you see in the Samaritan woman?

The Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus is a life-changing experience that brings forgiveness and hope to one who has been looking for love all of her life. She finds what her heart truly longs for in God's love, and she is transformed by this love.

Jesus' Encounter with a Tax Collector

In the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew recalls the way in which Jesus calls him to be a follower. As a tax collector, Matthew is a hated figure among the Jewish people. The Pharisees, religious leaders among the Jews who follow a strict moral code, complain to Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners" (Matt 9:11)? They imply that if Jesus is truly a man of God, he would only associate with people who live good, moral lives, men like themselves, for example.

1.4

Read Matthew 9:9-12.

- A. What do you observe about the interaction between Jesus and Matthew?
- B. What do you think Jesus means in his reply to the Pharisees in verse 12?
- C. Why do you think the Pharisees may have found it difficult to become followers of Jesus?

1.5

Compare these three individual encounters with Jesus. It may be helpful to create a chart.

- A. What common factors do you find in Jesus' encounter with each of these three individuals?
- B. What differences do you observe?
- C. What do you learn about approaching people with the Gospel from these three encounters?

We have looked at three encounters in which Jesus offers words of invitation to people from various backgrounds: Nicodemus, a respected religious ruler; the Samaritan woman, a social and moral outcast; and Matthew, a wealthy but hated Jewish businessman. Jesus' example indicates that all are welcome in God's kingdom.

All three of these individuals have two things in common: their sinful condition and their need for salvation. Jesus gives to each of them the same offer of a relationship with God. The invitation is not restricted to persons of a particular race, social group, economic level, or religious background. It is extended to all.

In God's eyes, there is no difference between Jew and non-Jew, religious people and atheists, ethical, moral persons and debased, wicked ones.² Ultimately, all human beings fall into the same sinful category (see Rom 3:22-23). We must recognize our need for salvation.

1A

Personal Reflection

1. Do you think all three of these individuals would be welcome in your church? Why or why not?
2. Sometimes, people avoid coming to church because they feel that they are not good enough, or they would not be accepted. They believe that church is a place for those whose lives are holy and good, not for people like them. What would you say to someone who expresses these thoughts?

Brooke sat down beside her co-worker at lunch. “Emma, our church is hosting a women’s retreat next month. It’s a great time to get away from it all and spend some time with God. Would you like to come?”

“A heathen like me hanging out with God? No way. He’d spend the retreat retreating from me!”

Brooke laughed. “What makes you say that?”

“I’m not the type God would want to be around. I live with my boyfriend, I’ve never been to church, I don’t talk to my family . . . I’m not good enough for God.”

“Well, none of us are! All of us have messed up in different ways. That’s why God sent His Son Jesus—to save us from our sins. If I’d waited until I’d gotten my life in order before I received Christ forgiveness, I’d still be lost and miserable. In fact, the only kind of people he saves are those who admit they’ve sinned and need a Savior.”

All of us have two things in common: our sinful condition and our need for salvation.

The Insurmountable Obstacle

Although Nicodemus is a respected religious teacher and has studied the Torah intensively, he misses an important truth. Like many Jewish leaders, he substitutes a life of doing good works for faith in God. The Jewish leaders think that they can earn their salvation by doing good works and by keeping the whole law of God. Many people today have the same idea. They go through life believing that those who live a good life deserve entrance to heaven and those who do not will be sent to hell.

A fresco on the wall of a monastery in Voronezh, Romania, depicts the final judgment. In it, a naked soul is shown being weighed on a scale. If the bag

Lesson 1 – Christ: Our Solid Foundation

containing his good works is not heavy enough, he will tumble off the scale into the fires of hell.

Works of art such as this conceptualize the widespread notion that salvation ultimately rests upon one's own efforts. Many people hope that in the end their good works will outweigh the bad and God will allow them into heaven. Is this the view taught in the Bible? Is it possible for any human being to tip the scales with good works and earn salvation?

From its opening pages, the Bible teaches us that there is an insurmountable obstacle standing in the way of salvation: the problem of sin. While God creates a perfect world and sets man and woman within it to serve as his representatives and stewards over creation, they choose a path of disobedience and rebellion against God (see Gen 1-3).



This choice to disobey God, which is called the fall, has sweeping consequences. Human beings become subject to both physical and spiritual death (see Rom 5:12-21).

1.6



Read Psalm 14:1-3.

What do you learn about the human condition from God's point of view?

We human beings come into this world with a rebellious spirit, an inclination to go our own way, a desire to live our lives independently of God. From the Bible we learn that the problem of sin is not a small one that God can simply overlook. We often tend to excuse the sin in our lives. "Well, no one is perfect." But the Bible describes our sinful condition as wickedness, vileness, filth, and rebellion against God.³

Ultimately, sin is rebellion against our sovereign Creator and Lord and an affront to his holiness. *Since God is absolutely holy, we cannot come into his presence unless our sin is dealt with.*

Our sin creates a vast separation between God and us. We are alienated from him. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he speaks of us as being enemies of God (see Rom 5:10). The Bible makes it clear that not only are we born with a sin nature, we actively choose to sin and to live our lives independently from God (see Ps 53 and Rom 3).

Our sin creates a vast separation between God and us.

Can we overcome the obstacle that separates us from God by our good works? In Romans 3:20, the apostle Paul states that *no one* will be declared righteous (justified) in God's sight on the basis of good works.

God's Provision for Our Salvation

By ourselves, we cannot overcome the barrier that sin creates between us and God. But thankfully, God has made a way for our salvation. However, if we do not understand our need for salvation, how can we receive this gift?

Understanding Our Need for Salvation

We might compare our attempts to please God by our good works with attempts to swim across the ocean. A weak swimmer may be able to swim a few meters. A strong swimmer may be able to swim a great distance, but it is nothing compared to the vast expanse of the ocean. Even the strongest swimmer will eventually succumb to fatigue and sink. So, it is with us when it comes to pleasing God by our good works. We are hopelessly inadequate and weak without the slightest chance of attaining heaven by our own efforts.

In order to respond to the gift of salvation, we must be aware of our need for it. Imagine you are sitting at home, and a friend hands you a life jacket. You would probably laugh and toss it aside. Now imagine you are in a boat at sea which is rapidly filling with water, and your friend hands you a life jacket. You would take it with a passion that was unknown to you when you sat in your living room and contemplated the same life jacket.

Once we understand how great the obstacle is which separates us from God and how desperate our situation is, we will gladly lift our hands to the One offering us rescue.

God in his mercy has not left us without a life jacket. Before the foundation of the world, God had a plan to save us. His plan involves providing a way for our sin to be taken care of so that we can be reconciled to God.

The Cross of Christ

God extends his mercy and grace to us by sending his Son to die for our sins. Jesus is the only one who is qualified to offer this sacrifice. He alone has lived a perfectly righteous life and is without sin. As Christ hung on the cross, he died in our place. He took the weight of the sins of the world upon himself, taking the penalty of our sin and paying a debt we could not pay.

God reveals his plan about Jesus through the prophets of the Old Testament. Seven hundred years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah writes of one who will come as a suffering servant, who will be wounded and bruised and beaten for our sins so that we can be healed and have peace with God (see Isa 53:1-9). Isaiah writes, “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6).

The apostle Paul understands the amazing truth of Christ’s death in our place and explains it in many passages. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 he writes, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (NIV). When

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we accept Christ’s sacrifice for our sin, we receive the perfect righteousness of Christ, the holy Son of God, as a free gift.

Martin Luther was a sixteenth-century monk who spent his early life in a desperate struggle to please God by his own good deeds; he remained painfully aware of his shortcomings. He spent hours in confession, yet he came away still carrying the weight of his guilt and inability to please a holy and righteous God.

By God’s mercy, as he was reading the Bible one day, his eyes fell on the life-changing words of Romans 1:17: “The righteous shall live by faith.” He realized that the righteousness of God comes to us by faith, in which “we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only we receive and suffer [allow] another to work in us.”⁴ Luther was dramatically changed. The burden of struggling to earn his salvation was lifted from his shoulders as he understood that Christ had already accomplished it for him.

The Resurrection of Christ

The work of Christ for us on the cross would have no significance apart from the truth of his resurrection.



Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23.

What are some of the arguments Paul makes concerning the importance of believing in the resurrection of Christ?

Some argue that Jesus was merely a good man, a great moral teacher, who died heroically but did not rise from the dead. To believe in such a person is worthless, Paul writes. A dead Christ would mean that we are still in our sins. Only one who rose from the dead can offer us the hope of eternal life and release from the power of sin. Only a resurrected Christ has any power to save.

God’s Grace toward Us

The Christian life, then, is a life based on the living Christ. We are totally dependent on God for salvation. To be saved, we must depend on Christ, on his sacrificial death on the cross for our sin, and on his resurrection that offers us eternal life.

**Salvation is by God’s grace alone,
through faith alone, in Christ alone.**

1.8

- A. How would you define grace?
- B. Thinking back on the three encounters with Jesus (Nicodemus in John 3, the Samaritan woman in John 4, and Matthew in Matthew 9), how do you see grace displayed?

Salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Paul writes, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (Titus 3:4-5, NIV).

The Source of Grace

Peter speaks of God as “the God of all grace” (1 Pet 5:10). From its opening pages, the Bible reveals God to be a God of grace. In Genesis we see his creation of a marvelous world in which he places his children to be recipients of his grace. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve receive many wonderful evidences of God’s love and care for them. They do nothing to earn their place there or to earn God’s love. God simply chooses to be kind, loving, and good to them. From the beginning we find that God showers his love and favor upon mankind. It is God’s nature to love and to show kindness and compassion to us. “The LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you” (Isa 30:18, NASB).

The Meaning of Grace

We may define grace as “undeserved blessing freely bestowed on man by God.”⁵ The word *favor* is often used in the Old Testament to convey the concept of grace. Philip Yancey, who wrestles with difficult issues of the Christian faith, writes, “Grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and

nothing I can do to make God love me less.”⁶ God shows kindness and favor freely toward us who have done nothing to deserve it.

An Example of God’s Grace

Perhaps few have understood God’s grace as clearly as the Apostle Paul. As a zealous Jewish religious leader named Saul, he has dedicated his life to extinguishing Christianity. He gives approval to the stoning of Stephen, the first to die for his faith in Christ. Saul’s hatred of the followers of Christ is so intense that in Acts 9:1 he is described as “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.”


1.9

Read the story of Saul’s conversion in Acts 9:1-19.

- A. What evidence do you find that Saul has done something worthy of salvation?
- B. On what basis do you think God saves Saul?

In an amazing act of grace, God reaches down to Saul, and his life is dramatically changed. Within a matter of minutes Saul, who has been spiritually blind, is physically blinded so that his spiritual eyes might be opened to the truth—that this Jesus whom he has been persecuting is the Lord. The Christ-hater is confronted with the living Christ, and his life is changed forever.

The Cost of Grace

While salvation is a free gift from God, it is not without cost. Jesus pays the ultimate price by sacrificing his life for us. Jesus is the only one who ever lived a completely righteous life and whose death for mankind could atone for our sin and provide our righteousness. “Grace costs nothing for the recipients but everything for the giver . . . the exorbitant price of Calvary.”⁷

The death of Christ on the cross at Calvary makes it possible for God to declare an unrighteous person (us) righteous. The one who trusts in Christ’s death on the cross for the free gift of salvation is declared righteous before God. An old English hymn expresses this

**God shows kindness
and favor freely
toward us who have
done nothing to
deserve it.**

thought with the words: “Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling.”⁸

1B**Personal Reflection**

How have you seen God’s grace in your life?

The Uniqueness of Christianity

A group of theologians in England were discussing the question, “How is Christianity different from all other religions?” Many suggestions were offered, but none seemed completely satisfactory. At that point C. S. Lewis, a noted Christian author and apologist, walked into the room, and the men called him over to join the discussion. When told the question, Lewis responded, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”⁹

Grace is indeed that which distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion. Every other religion is based on a system of merit—we get what we deserve, and we deserve what we get. We are called to do something or follow some rules in order to earn God’s love, or favor, or forgiveness, or approval. The Christian faith declares that Christ has already done it for us.

Someone has said, “Christianity is the only religion that guarantees heaven up-front.”¹⁰ Every other religion says, “Let us see how you live first.” We are placed on a treadmill of performance.

“I don’t think it matters what you believe as long as you have faith in something,” Vera told her friend Josh.

Josh smiled. “Imagine this: you’re trapped inside a burning building, and you pass out before you reach the exit. A firefighter risks his life to pull you from the fire. You wake up coughing, surrounded by medical personnel. They tell you that a firefighter rescued you. Overcome with gratitude, you decide to find and thank whoever saved you. Would it be okay to choose one firefighter randomly and thank him or her for saving your life?”

“No way!” Vera shook her head. “I’d want to know exactly who it was! Why would I thank someone who hadn’t saved me? That makes no sense.”

Josh nodded. “That’s what God says, too. There is salvation only through Jesus because he’s the only one who took our sins upon himself and died on the cross to save us. No one else has ever even claimed to have done that. So why trust anyone besides Jesus Christ for your eternal salvation?”

Many people believe that there are many paths to God. To them, the important thing is that one is sincere in what one believes. Yet Jesus himself says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He also describes himself as the door by which we enter in order to be saved (see John 10:9). Luke records Peter’s defense upon his arrest and includes this striking statement about Jesus in Acts 4:12, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

In Christianity, God offers mankind free, unconditional love and forgiveness, and we only need to receive it by faith. *There is one name and one name only that is worthy to be called upon for salvation: the name of Jesus Christ.* Some people find it unjust of God to require that all people come to him through Jesus Christ, yet we see the great mercy and love of God in his willingness to send his own beloved Son to die for a sinful world and to provide a way for us to be reconciled to him. What more could God do to show the depth of his love for us?

That our salvation depends upon the grace of God ultimately brings glory to God in a way that nothing else can. We cannot claim to deserve, to earn, to be worthy of even one iota of our salvation. We only need to receive his grace by faith.

Receiving the Gift of Salvation

At the beginning of this lesson, we asked the question, what does it mean to be a Christian? We have seen that a Christian is one who fully trusts in the work of Christ on the cross, not their good deeds, for salvation. We recognize our own sinfulness and know that we are incapable of pleasing God or saving ourselves. We have also seen that there is no one who is beyond the reach of God’s love and grace.

In John 1:12 the apostle John writes, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (NIV). In Acts 16:30-31 a man calls out to Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul replies, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (NIV).

Believing in Jesus means to trust him and his work for us on the cross, to place our confidence in the truth that his death and resurrection have paid the penalty of our sin. God transfers the righteousness of Christ to us, takes away our guilt, and restores us to an eternal relationship with him. All that is necessary is to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior. The simple step of believing in Jesus Christ as Savior is the response to God’s grace that places us into the family of God.

The Christian life is a life that is available for those who realize their sinful condition and need for a Savior. Our salvation is a gift of God that we do not deserve; it comes to us by God’s grace.

**The simple step of believing in Jesus Christ
as Savior is the response to God’s grace
that places us into the family of God.**

1.10

Imagine you are talking with Robert who is mentioned in the beginning of this lesson.

- A. What would you say to him if he asks, “How can I become a Christian?”
- B. What are some Scripture passages you would use in your conversation with him?
- C. Describe to Robert how you came to believe that Jesus died for your sins.
- D. Be prepared to role play this in your group meeting.

Sharing the Good News with Others

Once we understand and believe the good news that Jesus has saved us from our sin, it is natural to want to share this information with others. We do so out of an overflow of love and thankfulness, not obligation.

Sharing Christ with others may sound intimidating at first; we might imagine all kinds of negative responses—from indifference to rejection to outright hostility. But remember, it is the Holy Spirit’s job to move people toward a relationship in Christ. Our job is to share; we are not responsible for whether they accept Christ or not. He just asks that we share:

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Paul tells us that there can be a process to the reception of the gospel: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor 3:6). We do not know where a person is in his life. God has put him in our lives at this time for a reason. Whatever our role—planting seeds, watering, or seeing the person accept

Christ—God is sovereign and is letting us participate in advancing his kingdom by sharing the gospel.

Sometimes when sharing the good news about Christ, it is hard to know how to move conversation from a superficial to a spiritual level. One way to steer conversations towards spiritual matters is to share something from our life that is on a more personal level. Our own vulnerability often invites the other person to be more open.

Another way to move to deeper conversations is to ask questions about the person’s life. Sometimes people are just waiting for a listening ear to share their life struggles. If someone seems angry or impatient, a sympathetic comment may help them say what is bothering them. We can be ready to share a story about our own struggles and how our relationship with Christ has helped us if the occasion allows.

Watch for connections with others—a book they are reading, a T-shirt they are wearing, a song they are listening to, a YouTube video, a Tweet, or a recent event they are talking about. It can be a starting point to help us get to know them. If the person’s culture or faith differs from ours, we can ask questions about his culture and belief system that might springboard us into spiritual territory.

Praying silently while we are engaging in conversation with a person can open things up in surprising ways. God is an ever-present help! Never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit.

If someone chooses to share about a problem, fear, or grief he is experiencing, we can ask him how he is handling these challenges. Notice whether spiritual matters are part of the equation for him. We can share how the Lord has helped us with issues in the past as a way of turning the conversation to God. Offer to pray for him right then.

Simply being there and being a loving friend is one of the best ways to show them the Lord: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Our genuine friendship and support can demonstrate the love of God in a tangible way. People are often more open during times of loss, illness, or other hardships.

Look for opportunities to serve by making a meal, giving a ride, providing childcare, performing a repair, doing yard work, or visiting during an illness. We can also call to check on them during a period of unemployment or other rough time. These acts of love may give us opportunities to talk to her about a relationship with Christ and to pray for her.

Here are some open-ended questions that may be helpful in discussing spiritual things:

- *What do you think happens to us when we die?*
- *How would you describe God?*
- *How do you think we can please God?*
- *What does it mean to pray?*
- *What do you think it means to have faith?*
- *How would you describe the Bible?*
- *What ways does the Bible play a role in your life?*
- *How are you doing with all that is going on in your life?*
- *How do you decide what is right and wrong?*
- *How have your past experiences influenced your ideas about God?*

It is respectful, when moving the conversation to a deeper level, to ask their permission first: “Do you mind if I ask you something?” or “Can I ask you a question?”

Below is an example of how an everyday situation might open a door to share Christ.

Jump Start

Thankful for the headlights on his old Buick, Jay inched his way through the thick fog and heavy rain to work. It rained all day until just before quitting time. Perfect timing. Jay had a long to-do list to tackle. He hurried to his car and cranked the engine. Nothing. The battery was dead. He'd forgotten to turn off his headlights.

Jay spotted a man walking across the parking lot. "My car battery's dead. Would you mind giving me a jump?" Jay got the jumper cable out of his trunk while the man pulled his truck next to Jay's car. While the battery charged, Jay extended his hand, "I appreciate this. I'm Jay."

"No problem! I'm Garrett."

Jay turned the key, and the engine sprang to life. "Thank you so much!" Noticing Garrett's football decal on his truck, he asked, "that your team?"

"Most years," Garrett joked.

"Sunday a few of us guys are going to watch the game after church. Want to join us?"

"Church and then the game?" Garrett frowned, "I sleep in on Sunday mornings. Besides, I feel out of place at church. I think I make the good church people uncomfortable."

"Then Cornerstone Fellowship is perfect for you. We're all a bunch of sinners saved by grace, and at least 34 percent of us will tell you so!"

Garrett laughed. "Thirty-four percent, no kidding! That's unusual, isn't it?"

"No, not really." It was getting late, but Jay felt a nudge from the Holy Spirit,

"Are you as hungry as I am? How about a burger and fries, my treat?"

A few minutes later, they slipped into a booth near the back of a crowded restaurant. Once settled, Jay continued their earlier conversation.

"Garrett, I used to feel like you do about church. I was far from perfect. I lied, cheated, even stole when money was tight. I figured I'd be the last person the preacher would want to sit on a pew."

"For a fact? Something must have changed your mind."

"Honestly, the first week, I came in late and sat on the back row. As the minister spoke, it was like he could see inside my heart. He said that sin is the one thing that can separate us from God."

The waiter took their order, and then Jay continued, "I never thought that I could know God on a personal level. My mom did. That morning I found myself wanting what she had. The minister said that God has a deep love for me, so much so that he sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. That didn't seem like a fair swap—my sin for his forgiveness."

Garrett thought quietly. "My mom died when I was five, and dad raised me. He loved God. I remember memorizing John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'"

"That is a powerful verse, isn't it, Garrett? We can't do anything to earn God's forgiveness. It's a gift, the best one ever. That's grace!"

"Grace? What is grace?"

"Grace is God forgiving me based on what Jesus has done, not on what I deserve. It's pardon, not punishment. Forgiveness, not condemnation. Love, not anger."

Jay knew his most important to-do tonight was Garrett. He was building a

Lesson Summary

- We become part of the family of God through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ when we recognize our sinful condition that separates us from God and place our faith in the work of Christ on the cross for us.
- We are totally dependent on God for salvation, which is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

- Once we receive the gift of salvation, we can share that gift with others.



Adoration

- If you have never had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, come to him now. Tell him that you believe that he died for your sins and rose again to give you eternal life.
- Thank God for this wonderful gift of salvation that he has given to you.
- Spend some time responding to him for his grace in your life.

Notes

¹ Paul Wright, editor, *Shepherd's Notes: Genesis* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1997), 25.

¹ J.D. Douglas, ed., "Samaritans," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 875.

² Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 27.

³ Gen 6:5, wickedness; Ps 12:8, vileness; Prov 30:12, filth; Deut 13:5, rebellion against the LORD.

⁴ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (n.p., [1575]; reprint, London: James Clarke, 1953), 132.

⁵ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Grace," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1984), 479.

⁶ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 70.

⁷ Yancey, 67.

⁸ Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages," (public domain, 1776).

⁹ Related by philosophy professor Peter Kreeft at Calvin College, described in Scott Hoezee, *The Riddle of Grace: Applying Grace to the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 41-42.

¹⁰ Stephen Brown, *Key Life Tapes* (Key Biscayne, FL: Key Life Network, n.d).