

# The Basics

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Whether you've been a Christian your whole life or you're just starting out on your pursuit of God, you'll benefit from a careful study of the basic message of the Bible. This booklet will guide you through those basics, giving you an opportunity to respond to the message of hope.

**101**

## 101 | The Pursuit of God

The world is full of “gods”. People seek a “higher power” for a variety of reasons: to break free from a bad habit, to find out how to get to heaven, to discover purpose on earth, to solve the problem of pain, or to find true happiness. But the pursuit of God can be confusing and sometimes frustrating. Many people have come up empty-handed. That's why God's promise, spoken thousands of years ago, is so encouraging:

***“You will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with your whole heart.”***

*Jeremiah 29:13*

If we have a desire to know and understand God, then His desire is to reveal Himself to us and show us how to connect with Him. The purpose of this study is to investigate a few of the foundational truths about God that come from the Bible. We'll boil it down to the bare essentials, truths that can have the most powerful and long-lasting impact on our lives.

### **God loves me, so what's the problem?**

The story of God starts with the account of creation. The Bible tells us that God made the earth and everything in it. But his crowning achievement was the creation of man. God breathed His very breath of life into us. And He didn't simply walk away after He set the world in motion. All throughout the Bible God repeats His great goal for His most treasured creation:

***“You will be my people, and I will be your God.”***

*Jeremiah 30:22*

God's deep desire is to be in a relationship with us, His treasured people. This is great news, but there is a grave problem. Here it is: though God created us without flaws, He still gave us the ability to choose. The first human beings used that freedom to disobey God's instructions, and sin entered the world. Simply defined, sin is choosing our own path instead of God's path. Sin is when we rebel against God, thinking we know better and making choices that go against what He desires for us.

And the Bible says we've all sinned. Every one of us.

***“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”***

*Romans 3:23*

*Why are you interested in pursuing God? Have you ever been confused or frustrated in your pursuit?*

*Use this margin to write down your questions as you go along. Some can be answered now, others may be saved for later.*

Sure, some people seem better than others in this world, but the bottom line is that no matter how good we think we are, each of us is tainted by sin at the very core, at every level.

So why is sin such a big problem? Because it cuts us off from the relationship that God wants to have with us. The Bible tells us that sin separates us from God. And it describes this separation with a word that we all understand:

***"The wages of sin is death."***  
*Romans 6:23*

This is bad news. God loves us and we were created to be in relationship with Him, but our sin prevents it for now and eternity. But here's the good news: God didn't want to leave us stuck in our sin and cut off from Him – so He did something about it. And what He did has everything to do with the most important person in history: Jesus Christ.

### **What's the big deal about Jesus?**

When Jesus lived on this earth 2000 years ago, he was recognized as an incredibly wise teacher. Thousands came to hear what he had to say about God's desire to be in relationship with people and the roadblock that sin causes. One day, Jesus made a particularly bold statement about this dilemma:

***"If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."***  
*John 8:24*

This was a radical shift in the way people thought about religion. Conventional wisdom said you had to follow rules, do more "good" than "bad" and hope the scales would tip in your favor. But Jesus gave a whole new formula for solving the sin problem. It wasn't about *doing*; it was about *believing*. All throughout the Bible the formula is made clear:

***God saves you by his grace when you believe. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. It's not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.***  
*Ephesians 2:8-9*

Think about what makes you YOU: your emotions, your actions, your thoughts, your intentions. Can you give an example of how sin has tainted some of those areas?

According to this, what do we have to **do** to avoid "dying in our sins"? The one word answer is in the verse – circle it.

This idea is surprising to many people. Can you re-phrase it, putting it in your own words?

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So Jesus said if we “believe in him” we will be saved from the consequences of our sin and freed to live in relationship with God. But what does this “saving faith” look like? Is it simply saying the words, like some magical chant? No, biblical “saving faith” has two essential parts. **First, faith requires the right information about Jesus. Here's how the Bible lays it out:**

### **1. Jesus lived a perfect life.**

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was unlike any other human being in history. He was born of a virgin. He performed countless miracles, including raising people from the dead. In fact, he was the only person to live a sinless life. How did he do it? He was not just a good person – He was God.

***In Christ all the fullness of God lives in bodily form.***

*Colossians 2:9*

C.S. Lewis wrote that Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Some today think of him as a legend. What do you say?

### **2. Jesus died a gruesome death.**

As God in the flesh, Jesus took the punishment for the sins of the world when He died on the cross. God didn't simply say to us, “your sin – your decision to go your own way instead of mine – is no big deal!” Our sin is a major offense, and someone had to pay. That's why Jesus died a criminal's death. Now, forgiveness is available and a relationship with God is made possible again.

**But it was our sins that did that to him,  
that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins!  
He took the punishment, and that made us whole.  
Through his bruises we get healed.**

*Isaiah 53:5*

### **3. Jesus rose from the dead.**

The story of Christ does not end in the grave. Jesus died and was buried in a tomb, but three days later he rose to live again. He asserted his power over death, reversing the curse that we had brought upon ourselves through sin. The Bible promises that those who put their faith in Christ will be raised from the dead like He was. And we'll live eternally with God in heaven.

**And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will  
live with them. They will be his people, and God  
himself will be their God. He will wipe every tear  
from their eyes. There will be no more death or  
mourning or crying or pain, for the old order  
of things has passed away.”**

*Revelation 21:3-4*

## The attitude of faith

So “saving faith” starts with the right information about Jesus. But the Bible says that even the demons have this information! Yet demons will never have the relationship with God that we are promised. That's because ***believing in Jesus is more than just having the right information. It also requires the right attitude.***

The Bible calls the proper attitude toward Christ “repentance”. It literally means “to change one's mind”. The apostle Peter called his hearers to this very thing:

**“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”**

*Acts 3:19*

Repentance, the attitude of faith, says, “I've changed my mind about Christ. I accept Him as my Savior and Lord.” A new believer in Christ has a new desire deep within: to be God-directed, not self-directed. Saving faith is part of a fundamental change in the life of the believer. It's not just on the surface.

***At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!***

*2 Corinthians 5:16,17*

It's important to remember the order here: we belong to God (through faith) and then we behave like it (a new person). It doesn't work the other way around.

## What will you do with Jesus?

We've looked at the most important truths the Bible has to offer. The big question now is this: what will we do with Jesus? If we put our faith in Him, confessing the right information with the right attitude, welcoming Him into our lives as Savior and Lord, then we'll be saved. Saved from the consequences of our sin. Saved from death and eternal separation from God. And saved to live a new and meaningful life here on earth in a growing relationship with Him.

We can't work for it. We can't add to it. Jesus did for us what we cannot even begin to do for ourselves. It's a free gift, and we'll receive it immediately if we believe.

The Bible says the moment you respond to this, you'll be saved. If you'd like to do that today, you can say it in a simple prayer like this:

***“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”***

*Romans 10:9*

*“Jesus, I recognize I'm a sinner. I know that you died for me, and I want you to be my Savior and God. Thank you for this free gift. Amen.”*

## The Next Step

We're all on a journey in our pursuit of God. Identify where you are and what your next step is at Alpine Church.

***"I am already a Christian."***

*This was a refresher course for you. You've already heard this information and responded in faith.*

THE NEXT STEP

**201**

201 is a 7-week workshop designed to launch your spiritual growth at Alpine.

***"Today I put my faith in Christ."***

*Some or all of this was new information for you, and you responded to this message a moment ago.*

THE NEXT STEP

**READ ON**

Turn the page to learn about your new life in Christ and the practical step of baptism.

***"I want to keep investigating."***

*You've heard the basics, but you're not quite ready to accept them. You need more time.*

THE NEXT STEP

**INVESTIGATE**

Stay involved at Alpine, ask questions, and re-take **101** when you're ready.

## So I'm a Christian – Now What?

Now that you've put your faith in Jesus Christ, this is when you get to experience what makes God's grace so amazing. The Bible says that before we turned and put our faith in Jesus we were actually enemies of God (Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:20), we were in bondage to sin (John 8:34), and we were headed to an eternal existence separated from God (Romans 6:23). All of this is what the Bible calls spiritual death. But when we chose to put our faith in Jesus Christ, the incredible truth is that we crossed over from death to life. This is what the Bible says:

**"Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins... But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much, that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead."**

*Ephesians 2:1-5*

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are no longer spiritually dead, but spiritually alive. The Bible says we are not slightly improved versions of our old selves, but brand new creations! You might not feel any different, but inside you are a completely new person. Where we used to be enemies of God, we now are adopted as children of God (Romans 8:14-17). Where we used to be in bondage to sin, we have been set free to live new lives (Galatians 5:1). Where we used to be headed for eternity apart from God, we now are headed for eternity with God (Romans 6:23; John 5:24).

All of these changes are gifts from God. Remember, we don't deserve any of them, but because God loves us so much, He freely offers us this new life. And in response to this gift, we begin to operate under a new rule of life: **to find out what pleases God and do it**. It's the natural fruit of our new life in Christ.

The Bible is full of practical ways to start pleasing God with your life. As you start to read the Bible and pray to God on a regular basis, you will begin to understand more and more how to live a life of gratitude in response to God's amazing grace.

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Use this margin to take notes or write down your questions as you go along.

Have you already become aware of some of the things that please God? Write them down here.

## Baptism in Water

One of the first and most important ways to start to please God is to be baptized. Jesus taught his disciples,

**“I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I've given you.**

*Matthew 28:18-20*

It's important to remember that our works don't save us. This is true of baptism as well. The act of baptism doesn't save us. But because we are saved, we desire to put into practice our new rule of life: **to find out what pleases God and do it**. There are three primary reasons to get baptized as a new believer in Christ.

### 1. Obedience

Jesus clearly taught us to get baptized in water when we come to faith in Christ. That's reason enough to do it! Baptism is one of our first opportunities to honor God with practical obedience.

### 2. Symbolism

Water baptism is an important act of symbolism. When we go down into the water we symbolize the death of Christ. When we come out of the water we symbolize his resurrection and our new life in him. The Bible explains it:

**“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”**

*Romans 6:3-4*

### 3. Identification

Baptism in water is also a way to publicly identify yourself with Jesus Christ. When you get baptized, you are saying that you belong to him and are now a part of his people.

If you have recently put your faith in Jesus, get baptized! It will be a memorable experience and a spiritual marker for your new life in Christ. Talk to a friend or pastor to find out more.