

NEWLIFE

COMMUNITY CHURCH



Begin

First Steps Series

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INTRODUCTION

A Word of Encouragement for the Journey

My wife Dee and I have been helping people become followers of Jesus and grow spiritually for over 30 years. We have had hundreds of conversations at kitchen tables and in restaurants late at night with people searching for God. These lessons were not written from a Seminary desk or research library at a University. I wrote these lessons while studying the Bible with regular people in Chicago who were trying to get started in their journey as a follower of Jesus. I have enjoyed walking people through these lessons with tears, laughter, struggles, friendship and much prayer. Literally thousands of people have gone through these studies in the US as well as other parts of the world.

The three lessons covered in this book are essential for everyone serious about the call to follow Christ: Faith, Repentance and Baptism. This book will lead you to find answers directly from Scripture, so you will need a Bible. My goal is to help you understand and take the First Steps in your walk with God.

I'm convinced that you will have to count the cost, surrender yourself to God and overcome obstacles in order to apply what you learn. I pray that you will join thousands of others who have wrestled through these lessons and chose the narrow way of following Christ. May God give you the perseverance to follow through and hopefully soon you also will be able to help someone else begin his or her journey as a Christ follower.

Mark Jobe, Senior Pastor
New Life Community Church - Chicago

Who is this study for?

This study is especially designed to help the person who is just beginning to take his or her First Steps as a follower of Christ. Each lesson will help you develop a better understanding of what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus Christ. The commitment to become a follower of Christ will affect your future more than any other choice in life, so carefully consider and apply what you learn.

We live in a day and age when many people claim to believe in God, but sadly many do not show fruit of being true followers. Individuals who at one time prayed a “sinners prayer”, responded to an altar call, or were raised as “Christians” would do well to re-evaluate the commitment of a true disciple. We must return to the teachings of Jesus in order to fully understand the life of a disciple

Those who dare to take a fresh look may be surprised to discover both the joy and the cost of being a true follower of Christ.

How should this study be used?

1. Do one lesson a week. Take your time to go over every question and answer thoroughly. Answer each question using your own words rather than copying them word for word from the Bible.
2. If you are unable to answer a question, simply move on to the next one. When you have completed the lesson return to the difficult question and attempt to answer it. Even if you are unsure of the answer, do not leave the line blank; write down your best answer.
3. This study is most effective if you complete each lesson on your own, and then get together with an older disciple to review the answers. The life of a disciple is more caught than it is taught.
4. This Bible study works best using the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.
5. Make sure you begin to share and immediately apply the lessons you learn.

CHAPTER 1

REPENTANCE THE POWER TO CHANGE

REPENTANCE

The Power to Change

Andre is so choked up and sobbing that it is hard to hear what he is saying at first, but he keeps repeating over and over again, "I'm so sick of my life, I want to change, I want to change..." Do you ever feel that way? So many people want changes for good in their lives, but they lack the power. However, there is great news. Jesus came to give us the power to change. Let's discover how He wants to change our lives.

REPENTANCE: THE KEY TO BECOMING A DISCIPLE

Over and over again Jesus said, "Follow Me." We are called to be disciples (followers) of Jesus Christ. Read Matthew 16:24. If we are to be true disciples we must understand what it really means to be one of his followers.

1. The Apostle Peter is one of Jesus' devoted followers. One day, while he is preaching the good news (the gospel), the people are so moved that they ask, "What shall we do?" If you have heard the gospel, you may also be asking, "What should I do now that I've heard?" Read Acts 2:37-38. What does Peter tell them to do if they are to receive forgiveness of their sins?

What does REPENTANCE mean? REPENTANCE = CHANGE

"To turn about, to have a change of mind"

2. Jesus Christ also preaches the good news. His message is very simple. He asks all people to do two things. What are those two things according to Mark 1:14-15?

Is believing the same as repenting? No, but no one can truly believe without truly repenting. True belief leads to true change.

REPENT --> BELIEVE --> CHANGE

3. Read James 2:14-17 to understand true faith (belief). Can faith that brings no change save a person according to verse 14? True faith will always bring change in our lives. If it does not, what kind of faith is it according to verse 17?

Many people believe in Jesus, but most are not willing to repent. Imagine you're walking toward the edge of a cliff. Just before you step off the edge, you turn around. That's what repentance is like. We are headed the wrong way because of our sins, but then we believe and decide to turn around and follow Jesus. That's repentance. Repentance always brings about change in our lives.

4. In 2 Peter 3:9 God tells us that He does not want anyone to be lost (or perish). He is patient with us. What is God giving us time to do?

5. The Bible tells us we should turn away from acts that lead to death (spiritual death). Can you list some of those acts we are called to repent of? See Galatians 5:19-21 for help.

What warning does the Apostle Paul give in verse 21 to those who do not want to change?

What areas have you personally had to repent of in choosing to follow Christ?

UNDERSTANDING TRUE REPENTANCE

6. The Apostle Paul preaches a clear message wherever he goes. True repentance must be distinguished from false repentance. According to Acts 26:20, the gospel message has three parts to it. List the three parts and how these work in your life.

7. Many people say that they “believe”, but as we see, true belief must lead to change. Write out Matthew 3:8, and then describe what you think the fruit of repentance is.

8. Read the parable in Luke 13:5-8. (a parable is a story that illustrates a message). To understand it let's look at the characters in it. The owner of the fig tree is God. The fig tree represents people and the fruit represents the good changes in our life. Now in your own words, summarize what this parable is saying.

What do you think happens in our lives when we do not show fruits of repentance?

9. We've discovered that we must believe, repent and be baptized. Baptism is the first command Jesus gives us to follow. It is a public statement that Jesus washes our sins, that our old lives are buried and that now we will live for Christ.

Do you think a person can honestly say he or she is a follower of Christ if he or she is unwilling to follow the first command?

According to John 14:15, if a person truly loves Christ, then what should he or she do?

10. A person can be sorry, yet not truly ready to change. Have you ever seen someone who is sorry but not really repentant? Describe the difference. What does godly sorrow lead us to according to 2 Corinthians 7:9?

Fill in the blanks according to verse 10.

“Godly sorrow brings _____ that leads to _____ and leaves no _____ but worldly sorrow brings _____.”

11. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. If anyone is in Christ (a disciple), he is letting go of the old (repentance) and taking hold of the new (trusting). How would those around you describe the changes they see in you?

Is there something God is seeking to set you free from? If so, take time now to repent (turn away) from those things which may be hindering you from being a committed disciple of Christ. Write out your prayer.

Keep in mind that there are sins you must continue to repent of as long as they keep showing up in your life. When you do sin, what should you do right away according to 1 John 1:9?

If you have never repented and received Christ as Savior and Lord, then maybe it is time. Ask Him to save you, by repenting and receiving Him as Lord of your life. It's the best, life-changing decision you will ever make.

REPENTANCE GIVES US GOD'S POWER TO CHANGE!

Did you take the opportunity to share your faith with anyone this week? Comment.

STEPS TO BEGIN

Complete your **Daily Bread** calendar in the front inside cover of this book. Record the scriptures that speak to you each day.

Practice your **Memory Verse** for this week. Memorize it to hide God's Word in your heart.

Review your **Prayer List** in the back inside cover of this book. Ask God who you can pray for and share with this week.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. In your own words, define the word repentance.
2. What areas have you repented from in order to follow Christ?
3. In your own words, explain the message of the gospel.
4. Read 2 Corinthians 7:9. How does Godly sorrow lead us to repentance?
5. Who is one person you can share your faith with this week?

CHAPTER 2

FAITH OUR SOURCE OF GROWTH

FAITH

Our Source of Growth

In downtown Chicago, there is a balcony entirely made of glass you can step onto and feel like you are floating 1,300 feet up in the air. It is attached to the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere and sticks out 4.3 feet from the ledge. When it was first being built, many were speculative of how anyone in their right mind would pay money to walk on to something seemingly so fragile? Now it is one of the top tourist attractions in the city.

WHAT IS TRUE FAITH?

1. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that without faith we cannot please God. Faith in God is believing enough to trust Him completely. True faith allows us to understand two basic facts as we come to God. What are they according to Hebrews 11:6?

2. Faith is more than just believing with our minds. Many people believe intellectually in God yet are not true disciples. James 2:19 and 26 speaks about this issue. Write out these two verses and explain the point being made.

3. In Matthew 7:21, we see the difference between just believing in God and having true faith. Can you describe the difference?

4. True faith will always lead us to action. What is the man compared to who hears the Word and puts it into practice according to Matthew 7:24-25? Explain the comparison.

5. What is the man compared to who hears the Word and does not put it into practice according to Matthew 7:26-27? Again, explain this comparison.

6. Do you know people who say they believe; yet their faith does not change their life? Comment on what you have seen.

7. Many of us struggle like doubting Thomas: unless we see it, we won't believe it. What kind of people does Jesus bless in John 20:28-29?

8. How is your faith personally attacked the most? What do you do when it comes under attack?

HOW DO WE INCREASE OUR FAITH?

9. Do you ever wish you could have more faith or could believe in a deeper way? You can. Read Romans 10:17. Where does faith come from?

10. How do you think this gives birth to faith in our lives?

11. Where do you get the faith-building message in your life?

12. After reading this verse, how would you encourage someone who is doubting and weak in faith to increase his or her faith?

13. The Bible says in Jude 1:20, "Build yourselves up in your most holy faith." According to 2 Timothy 3:16, we as believers should use the word of God to build each other up. List the four ways this is done beside the correct definition.

_____ To make or set right. To alter or adjust a wrong way.

_____ To strongly disapprove or seek to turn someone away from something.

_____ To cause someone to know and understand a subject.

_____ To form by instruction, discipline, or drill.

14. You must allow the Word of God to be applied to your life in these four ways. Are there other believers who are confident enough to teach, rebuke, correct and train you? Who are they? Describe how one of these things has happened in your life recently.

15. Evaluate how well you respond to the application of the Word of God to your life. Circle one number (ten being the highest score) to describe how well you are doing in these areas.

a) How teachable are you?

TEACHING 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

b) Do you admit it when faults are pointed out?

REBUKING 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

c) Do you allow yourself to be corrected?

CORRECTING 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

d) How well do you keep growth assignments?

TRAINING 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

16. Read Hebrews 3:12-13. According to verse 13, how can we help prevent someone from developing an unbelieving heart (weak faith) so that they do not turn away from God?

WHAT DOES FAITH DO IN OUR LIVES?

17. All the gifts that God has prepared for us come through faith. Without faith those gifts are not available to us. How does James 1:6-8 describe the man who doubts?

18. Why do you think a doubting man is compared this way?

19. According to verse 7, what can the man without faith expect to receive from the Lord? (Remember what Hebrews 11:6 says.)

20. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. We see that our forgiveness and salvation are gifts from God. How do these gifts come to us?

21. Grace is a gift we receive when we do not deserve it, God's unmerited favor. According to verse 9, why does the gift of salvation come his way?

22. Although our salvation does not come to us by good works, good works are a result of our salvation. Read verse 10 and explain why we are created and what God prepares for us to do in advance.

23. Righteousness = being right with God. Read Romans 3:22, and answer these questions about righteousness.

Where is righteousness from?

How does it come?

To whom does it come?

24. In Mark 9:21-24, we read the account of a father who is desperate to solve his son's problems. What do we learn about the power of faith from verse 23?

25. Do you feel like the father of the child who makes the following request in verse 24? "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief?" If you are feeling that way about something in your life now, write a brief prayer asking the Lord to increase your faith in this area.

Determine now to build up your faith and keep it strong. Commit yourself to practicing these faith-building steps.

- Read a passage from the Word of God each day.
- Keep in touch with other disciples daily.
- Keep your heart from any habitual sin that would harden it.

So build yourself up in your most holy faith. Remember, faith is the source of our growth.

STEPS TO BEGIN

Complete your **Daily Bread** calendar in the front inside cover of this book. Record the scriptures that speak to you each day.

Practice your **Memory Verse** for this week. Memorize it to hide God's Word in your heart.

Review your **Prayer List** in the back inside cover of this book. Ask God who you can pray for and share with this week.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. In your own words, define the word faith.
2. What is one area of your life you are putting your faith into practice?
3. In what areas do you doubt or struggle with your faith? Ask God to help you in that area.
4. Read Jude 1:20. How do we practice these in our group? Which area does God want you to grow in?
5. Who is one person you can share your faith with this week?

CHAPTER 3

BAPTISM

OFF WITH THE OLD,
ON WITH THE NEW

BAPTISM

Off With the Old, On With the New

“It was one of the proudest moments of my life. I’ll never forget it,” Bill says as he reflects on the day of his baptism. “It felt good knowing I was taking a stand for Jesus Christ and publicly committing myself to being a follower of Jesus. I know God was smiling from above saying, ‘This is my child in whom I am well pleased.’” Bill and so many others share these feelings about their day of baptism. But, just what is baptism and why is it so important for a disciple of Jesus? It’s an important subject in the Bible and in our lives; so let’s take a closer look.

SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

1. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus gives His disciples their mission. In these very important verses, Jesus sent His followers to make disciples of people from every nation. In this important mission statement, what two things are they to do with every person becoming a disciple?

2. The first time the Gospel is ever preached is in Acts 2. The people who hear Peter’s message are “cut to the heart”--they are convicted. They asked Peter what to do. Read Acts 2:38-41. What does Peter tell them to do and how do they respond?

3. In Acts 8:12-13, Philip preaches the Good News to a group of people. What two things do they do when they hear his message?

4. Luke 2:21-22 tells how Joseph and Mary presented Jesus at the temple before the Lord and Luke 2:41-52 shows that from an early age Jesus knew the Scripture and had a deep desire for the things of God. If Jesus was already following God, why then, according to Matthew 3:15, does He get baptized?

5. Jesus was baptized when He was thirty years old by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-16). He is our sinless Savior, yet He humbled Himself and set an example for us to follow. What does Jesus' example and humility in being baptized communicate to you?

Remember, Jesus was baptized after 30 years of faithful, fervent, sinless life. His baptism didn't cancel out his godly upbringing—it honored his spiritual past.

6. Getting baptized can be compared to getting married. Both ceremonies publicly declare one's love and loyalty to another. Of course, there are some individuals who want to live with a partner, but not get married. Sadly, people shy away from marriage for some of the same reasons they avoid baptism. Can you list a few reasons?

7. Water baptism is an outward sign of what happens to us on the inside. When you are baptized, you are publicly declaring, "I have been forgiven, and I'm proud to be a disciple of Jesus". What does Jesus say about those who are unwilling to acknowledge him before others? Read Matthew 10:32-33.

8. Some people find it hard to be baptized because of what family and friends may say. They try to keep peace in their family by not taking the step of baptism or by postponing it indefinitely. What counsel does Jesus give to this matter according to Matthew 10:34-39? Explain this in your own words.

9. According to Matthew 10:37, do you think someone who avoids their baptism because of family pressure is ready to become a disciple? Why or why not?

WHAT DOES MY BAPTISM MEAN?

10. Baptism places a new disciple into what group, according to I Corinthians 12:12-13?

11. The word “baptize” in the Bible means “to dip, to plunge under, to submerge.” Read Romans 6:1-4. According to verse 3, whom are we baptized into and to what are we baptized into?

12. According to Romans 6:4-5, what does going down into the water represent?

13. What do you think coming out of the water represents?

14. Read Ephesians 4:22-32. Through baptism we see that a true disciple must be willing to put off the old self and put on the new self. What does Ephesians 4:22-24 tell us about the old self?

15. Like filthy old clothes, we are to put off the old corrupt ways of living. Then we are to put on the new self. What does Christ create the “new you” to be like according to verse 24?

Read verses 25-32 and describe some practical ways you can take off the old and put on the new.

	What to take off...	What to put on...
Ephesians 4:25		
Ephesians 4:28		
Ephesians 4:29		
Ephesians 4:31-32		

16. Baptism proclaims that our old self is put to death, and the new self has been raised in Christ. How does the Apostle Paul describe his death to the old self in Galatians 2:20?

17. Paul makes it clear that the new life he lives is not a result of his own effort. What causes Paul to live the new life?

HOW SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

18. We already see that baptism represents our old life or self being buried with Christ. We also learn that the word baptize means “to dip, to plunge under, to submerge.” The words “pour” or “sprinkle” are not used regarding people being baptized in the Bible. Please fill in the blanks for these verses.

Mark 1:10 “As Jesus was _____
the water”

Acts 8:38 “Then both Philip and the eunuch _____
_____ the water”

Acts 8:39 “When they _____
the water”

19. According to Matthew 28:19, when someone is becoming a disciple he or she should be baptized in whose name?

This aspect of baptism reminds us that we have a personal relationship with each name mentioned. God the Father forgives us and adopts us as His children (Ephesians 1:3-8). Jesus the Son makes the way for us through the cross (John 14:6.) The Holy Spirit lives in us and empowers us to live as children of God (Romans 8:9-17).

WHEN SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

20. An interesting account about baptism is found in Acts 8:26-40. What does the eunuch ask Philip right after hearing and accepting the gospel message?

21. Read Acts 16:31-33, and describe how long this man and his family wait to be baptized once they believe.

SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED AGAIN?

As you have seen through this study, baptism is commanded by Jesus for all those who would follow him. You have also observed that baptism is pictured throughout the book of Acts as a response carried out by people who hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus. -Sometimes, people raised in other Christian traditions were presented for baptism as babies or very young children by their parents. Babies and very young children cannot confess their own faith in Jesus and choose to be baptized.

22. Does their baptism fulfill the command of Jesus or the pattern of the church in Acts regarding baptism? Why? Read Acts 19:1-5 to help form your answer. If you have not yet been baptized as a personal confession of your faith in Jesus, what should you do?

ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THE PLUNGE?

Matthew 28:19-20 tells us we are to make disciples of all nations. The first step a disciple takes is the step of believers' baptism. With this step the disciple is declaring he or she has truly laid down his or her life to follow Christ. Now that you've investigated what the Bible teaches about baptism, write down any decisions you are making as a result of what you have learned. If you were already baptized as a true follower of Christ, then write down what that day meant to you. May your baptism be a great day reminding you of what Christ has done for you and your public commitment to follow Him.

STEPS TO BEGIN

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Questions for Group Discussion

1. How would you explain to someone the meaning of baptism?
2. Read Ephesians 4:22-32. What stands out to you most in this list? Why?
3. When did you taken the step of baptism? Share with the group about that day.
4. If you have not yet been baptized, what is holding you back? Are you ready to take that step in following Jesus?
5. Who is one person you can share your faith with this week?

APPENDIX A

My Next Big Step

Congratulations! You have completed your first book in the GPS. This is a healthy sign of commitment and faithfulness. Keep this book for reference when you mentor other believers through the same steps you've taken.

At this point it is very important that you chart your next steps and follow through without delay. Here are three key steps to take:

1. Set your Baptism Date: If you haven't already set the date with your mentor do so right now and schedule your baptism date. In preparation for your Baptism be sure to:

- Sign up at the information center and ask about your Baptism t-shirt. This is the shirt you will be baptized in.
- Bring appropriate clothes: An under-shirt, towel, swimming trunks or pants and a dry set of clothes to change into.
- Your Baptism is a great day to plan a special lunch after service for all your friends. It also encourages their attendance. Who doesn't like free lunch?

2. Tell the World: If you haven't already done so, contact all the people on your love list and anyone close to you inviting them to witness your Baptism. It is a special day that marks a life-changing commitment like no other. Invite your friends and family to your big event. Make sure to fill out the correct date, time and location on the invites.

3. Plan Your Next Big Step: Now that you are taking the step of believer's Baptism you're ready to take the next step in the GPS:

- Connect into a Small Group, or visit a Membership Class,
- Engage in serving in and out of the church or
- Grow by partaking in an Encounter Retreat.

We encourage you to take advantage of the growth opportunities that are happening this season. You can find more information about all these things at our Resource Center and our website at www.newlifecommunity.church.

APPENDIX B

The Basics of Salvation

A – ADMIT my sinful condition and need for salvation. (Repentance)

God our creator is holy, loving and just (Exodus 34:6-7). He desires fellowship with us, and He loves to bless us (Psalm 103:1-5). Though humans were created in perfect fellowship with God, the first man Adam rebelled against God and brought sin and death upon all humans (Romans 5:12). Sin, any rebellion against God, is what separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). I was born a sinner by nature (Psalm 51:5). In my life I have violated both my God-given conscience and the revealed laws of God (Romans 3:14-15; Exodus 20:1-17). God is just and must punish all sin. (Exodus 34:7) God's just punishment for sin is death, eternity in hell (Romans 6:23; Matthew 25: 41; Revelation 21:8). Though I may have done some good in my life, I know my good deeds cannot earn salvation or cancel out my sins (Titus 3:4-5). Because of my sin I am deserving of God's punishment and can do nothing but ask for mercy (Romans 3:23; Luke 18:13-14). Sin destroys my mind, my body and my relationships. Because I believe these things about my sinful condition, I stop trusting in my own good deeds to save me and turn away from my sin. Acts 20:21- I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

B – BELIEVE the truth about Jesus Christ. (Faith)

Jesus Christ is God in human flesh (Colossians 2:9), who loved us and willingly died for guilty sinners (Romans 5:8). Jesus paid the death penalty that sinners deserved to pay (1 Peter 2:24). Through His sacrifice, justice was served (Romans 3:25-26). God can now allow sinners to be forgiven and restored to Him when they repent of sin and trust in Jesus (Acts 5: 31). We can be saved because of God's grace (undeserved favor), through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus forgives sins, gives sinners His righteousness and restores them to fellowship with God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Believing in Jesus for salvation means relying upon Him alone to make me a new person, give me new spiritual life, give a life of spiritual victory here and now (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:4-5; John 10:10) and one day bring me to eternity in heaven (John 3:16).

C – CONSECRATE myself to God by trusting and obeying His Word.

I choose to trust and follow Jesus Christ daily, living for Him since He died for me (2 Corinthians 5:15). I will work out the free gift of salvation by letting God work in me (Philippians 2:12-13). I will let God renew my mind and transform my life by reading and obeying His Word (Romans 12:1-2; James 1:22). I will let the Holy Spirit bring changes to my character (Galatians 5:22-25). I will let God make me holy and accomplish His will through my life (Ephesians 2:10; Ephesians 4:22-24). I will celebrate God's grace and mercy by joining up with other believers who can encourage me to follow Jesus (Hebrews 10:24-25). I will give God glory by loving people and telling them about salvation in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9-12).

NEW LIFE

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Complete the entire First Steps Series!



Begin

Take the plunge into your new life in Christ. This study is designed for new believers and those who are preparing to take the step of baptism.



Connect

Find belonging in the family of God. Connect in a small group and attend our Discover New Life Class to learn more about who we are and what we believe.



Grow

Develop the disciplines that make the difference. This study will stretch and strengthen your faith as you learn how to study God's word, pray, and trust God.



Engage

Discover your God given design to impact the world. This study will help you learn how to share your faith, serve others, and find a healthy rhythm of work and rest.



Disciple

Become a multiplier and world changer. This study will help you understand Jesus' plan to change the world by investing in individual lives one at a time.

Learn more at newlifecommunity.church
or at a New Life location near you.