

KEVIN BERRY

the

# JOURNEY

your adventure **begins...**



# **The Journey**

Your Adventure Begins

**Kevin Berry**

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# The Journey

## Your Adventure Begins

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# Congratulations

## Let the Celebration Begin!

Picture with me a massive celebration. Confetti is flying everywhere, people are jumping up and down, the sound of noisemakers and fireworks has filled the atmosphere. This is what has taken place in Heaven. Who is the focus of this celebration? You are!

*Count on it—that's the kind of party  
God's angels throw every time one lost  
soul turns to God.*

*Luke 15:10 MSG*

That's right—all of Heaven throws a massive party every time one person comes to Christ. I celebrate with all of Heaven over you and say a heartfelt, "Congratulations!" When you decided to follow Jesus—believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord—some very significant things happened. Here are just a few of them:



**1. You became a brand new person!**

You have a new nature—it's God's nature on the inside of you.

*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 5:17 NLT*

**2. You entered into a family—God's family.**

You are a child of the living God!  
That is huge!

*But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.*

*John 1:12 NLT*

**3. All your sins have been erased and you have a brand new start in life.**

*Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight.*

*Romans 4:7 NLT*

#### 4. **You have been made a friend of God.**

*So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our LORD Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.*

*Romans 5:11 NLT*

When you decided to give your life to Christ, you started a journey that promises to be the ride of your life. It's a journey that has everything to do with cultivating a personal relationship with the living God.

***You will never be content to know about God when you were created to personally know Him!***

Years ago, our family was on vacation at a cabin on a lake. I was taking a walk when I noticed something hanging out of my dog's mouth. As I got closer, I discovered it was a fishing line. The hook was stuck on his lip and he was dragging the line with a couple sinkers attached to it. How he managed to pull that one off, I will never know. What I did know was that I had to figure out how to get the hook out of his mouth. He was a big pit bull, and as big as he was, there was nothing he could do to get the hook out himself. He was stuck and needed help.

This is where all of us have been. We have all been stuck in sin and there was absolute-

ly nothing we could do to fix the sin problem dangling from our lives. Just as our dog had to sit still and trust me to get the hook out for him, so we come to Jesus just as we are—stuck and unable to get unstuck on our own. But we trust Him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. When you placed your faith in Jesus, you were set free! You no longer have a sin problem. Jesus has dealt with that for you. Now it's time to move on in your spiritual journey and become more and more like Jesus every day!

As we spend the next few chapters together, my desire is that you will come to know God better, and be well on your way to cultivating your personal relationship with God.

*I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.*

*Ephesians 1:16b–17 NLT*

**Pray this with me:** *Father, I thank You that You have set me free! You have done for me what I could never do for myself. I thank You for saving me and rescuing me. My heart is full of gratitude. I ask You to give me the spiritual wisdom and insight I need to grow in my knowledge of You, that with every day I will find myself knowing You better! I don't want to just know about You...I want to know You personally! I recognize that Your Son, Jesus, gave His life for me, so I give my life to You! Everything that I am and all that I hope to be—I'm Yours! Grant me ears that will hear Your voice and a heart that will obey. I love You! Amen.*



# All About Relationship

## The Invitation to Friendship

There is a special invitation that God extends to you. It's an invitation that could change your life! Too many ignore it; they think it's too good to be true. It's an invitation that has everything to do with your friendship with God.

A little boy crossed the street one day. He had a backpack full of books, papers, and school supplies. He accidentally dropped his backpack and the books fell out, papers flew everywhere, an apple rolled down the street. He created a huge traffic jam and people started yelling at him. As he tried frantically to pick up his things, one man quietly walked up to the little boy and began to help. The boy looked at the man with tears in his eyes and asked, "Are you God?"

When you think of God, what thoughts come to your mind? How do you picture Him? In your mind, is He like the people yelling in frustration, "You idiot, get out of the road, hurry up!" or is He like the man who came alongside, not to criticize but to help?

*Your view of God is unique in that it affects every area of your life!*

One of the most remarkable things about this amazing journey is the fact that God invites us to friendship, and He's a great friend! Think about that for just a minute...let that one soak in a bit. The God who made the heavens and the earth wants to be your friend! It's true! Sometimes we just want God to fix things in our lives. But what He wants is something so much deeper; He wants friendship!

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**“The God who made the heavens and the earth wants to be your friend!”**

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When you realize that God is your biggest fan...that He is for you, not against you... that through His Son, Jesus, He has forgiven all your sin...that He is not looking at your faults;

He is looking at your future...when you realize He not only *loves* you, He *likes* you... that changes everything!

Here's some good news: When you gave your life to Jesus Christ, you didn't enter into a religion; you entered into a relationship—a friendship with the living God! Just read what God's Word has to say about this divine invitation:

*For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.*

*Romans 5:10 NLT*

*The LORD is a friend to those who fear him.*

*Psalms 25:14a NLT*

*I no longer call you slaves...now you are my friends.*

*John 15:15 NLT*

As your friend, God will relentlessly seek to bring out the best in you! It's true that your best friends are the ones who bring out the best in you. God never focuses on your "old" man—the old you before you came to Christ. He does not



think about your past; He relentlessly focuses on your future. He works to bring out the best in you, and to develop in you the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As your friend, He will be there for you when you need Him. God promises to be there for you, to be your ever-present help in times of trouble! He's a friend who has your back—even when others seem to leave you hanging.

*God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.*

*Psalm 46:1 NLT*

So how can you develop a great friendship with God? Let me share with you a few simple steps you can take that will bring you closer to the kind of friendship with God your heart longs for.

### **1. Choose friendship over information.**

*“Every person is fulfilled or frustrated to the degree he or she is in intimate friendship with God.”*

*—Joy Dawson*

Too many people settle for information when God offers friendship. Determine that you aren't going to be one of them. Determine in

your heart that you are going after friendship with God, not information about God. Friendship speaks of knowing a person by experience while information speaks of facts—mere head knowledge. You can read a book about roller coasters, try to figure out how they're made, what kind of engineering it takes...or you can actually go to an amusement park and hop on the largest roller coaster and experience it for yourself!

The invitation of the Gospel is something far greater than learning more about Jesus. It's a bold call to personal friendship, a powerful relationship to be experienced. You can be aware that God exists, you can study and know things about God...or you can know Him!

## **2. Be a person of faith.**

Friends from all over the world, from different cultures, speaking different languages, all have one thing in common—they trust each other! It is impossible to have a close friendship without trust, but it is inevitable with trust.

*It isn't frenzy, but faith, that facilitates intimacy.*

Abraham was known as the guy who was a friend of God. He entered into a dimension of relationship with God that most thought

was impossible. What was it about Abraham that caused God to befriend him? Abraham trusted God—he was a man of faith.

*Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.*

*Romans 4:20–21 NLT*

Scripture says that it is impossible to please God without faith. But with faith: you can become a friend of God, your life can put a smile on God's face, you will have a tenacity that will refuse to give up regardless of what things look like, and you will have the ability to see possibilities, not just problems.

### **3. Walk in simple obedience to the Lord.**

*"...You are my friends if you obey me."*

*—Jesus*

*John 15:14 CEV*

Friendship with God is only your next step of obedience away. One step! Not one mile! Some think that maybe if they pray more, if they become a kinder person or if they work harder

and read the Bible more that someday God will want to be friends with them. That's crazy...and it's totally against God's way of doing things.

I'm so thankful that friendship with God is available because of what Jesus did, not because of all the good I have done—as if I would ever have the ability to “earn” such a great friendship.

*Seemingly small actions of obedience often set in motion the greatest forces of Heaven!*

In the Bible, a young boy was asked to give the Lord a small thing—a few fish and some bread. Out of that small act of obedience, the Lord fed thousands of people. Understand that it is your small acts of obedience that position you for the greatest friendship possible—friendship with God. So what should you do from here?

Simply do the last thing the Lord told you to do. As you read through the Bible, look for things the Lord wants you to do—then do them! These could be things like: forgive, refuse to hold a grudge, put others first, be thankful, honor the Lord's house, and obey the law of the land.

**Prayer:** *Father in Heaven, I'm blown away with the thought that You have made me Your friend. With everything that I am, I want to know You. I want to experience a close friendship with You. I thank You for making this a possibility. Grant me the wisdom to do my part to pursue this friendship. I thank You! Amen.*

# Action Steps

1. **What thoughts fill your mind when you think about God?** Go ahead and write them down right now.

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2. **What thoughts fill your mind when you think about the fact that God is a friend of yours?** Yes, He knows you completely... and calls you His friend!

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3. **What practical steps are you going to take this week to pursue a greater friendship with God?** Remember, great friendships don't just happen.

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# Come and Talk With Me

## The Secret Power of Prayer

What do friends do naturally? They talk with each other. They send each other text messages, they encourage each other, and they talk about the stuff of life.

We have a holy invitation that goes right along with the invitation God gives us to friendship. It's the invitation to come and talk with Him.

*My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, "LORD, I am coming!"*

*Psalm 27:8 NLT*

The essence of prayer is all about RELATIONSHIP with the living God...the very God who personally invites you to come and talk with Him.

A friend sent me an e-mail one day saying, "Every week, your messages challenge me. Well, I have a challenge for you. How about you



bring your entire family up to our cottage for a couple days and the two of us go skydiving... what do ya say?"

As I read that, I think I said out loud, "YIKES!" I hate heights and have never had any desire to jump out of a perfectly functioning airplane. But for some reason, I just couldn't seem to say no to the challenge so I agreed, and a date was set. I began praying, asking the Lord to get me out of this. I received a jury summons for the exact day of our scheduled skydive and thought this had to be the answer to my prayers. I had never been so excited about jury duty in my life! Yet to my dismay, they ended up not needing me.

It came down to the day of the skydive and we had a three-hour drive to reach our friends' cabin where we would meet them and then drive to the airport to go skydiving. On the way there I must have sung every "rain" song I could think of, praying, "Lord, let it rain! You are God, so anything is possible! You can make it rain, You can make it too windy. Please, Lord!" But there was not a cloud in the sky and it was a beautiful day. Before I knew it I found myself in a plane ten thousand feet above the earth! There was a skydiver named Trevor attached to me...and

off we went! Wow, what a rush that was. What I thought I would never do, I was doing...and I loved it!

What I loved even more was what happened the next day. I went for a walk to talk with the Lord. He spoke a word to my heart. Remember—talking is just something friends do.

*“Kevin, this skydiving experience was not by chance...I planned this for you. You don’t have to know how to be Pastor of Mount Hope Church, you don’t have to know how to fix everything, you don’t have to know how to do everything that must be done...what you must know is how to dwell in My presence...how to stay attached to Me. Then you just go along for the ride.”*

This, my friend, is what prayer is all about—staying attached to Jesus. I don’t know how to skydive or when to pull the parachute—nor do I have to know. I just have to make sure I am attached to the guy who does know! This is a great word for you today. You don’t have to know how to fix everything in your life. You don’t have to know how to do everything that needs to be done. What you do have to know is how to stay attached to Jesus. Trust Him...He knows what He is doing. When you are attached to Jesus through prayer, all you have to do is go along for the ride of a lifetime!

*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches.*

*John 15:4–5a NKJV*

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**“What you must know is how to dwell in My presence.”**

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Your job is to abide in Jesus...to remain attached to Him. And if you make that your focus, He'll take care of everything else. You are meant for a life of unbroken fruitfulness and unbroken friendship with God. There are treasures just waiting for you in the secret place—a place of prayer and communication with the Lord. There are rewards in God's Kingdom that are connected to your time spent with Him.

There are treasures of wisdom, encouragement, resources, and divine strategies for you in this secret place.

Years ago, while opening our dishwasher, I realized that there was something blocking the bottom tray from sliding out correctly. It had been like that for over ten years. Every time we opened the door and pulled out the bottom tray, it kind of bumped over something. But this day, I took the time to take a closer look. I discovered there was a piece of rubber lining that had come out of place. In about three minutes I had it back in place. What had been broken for ten years was now working just great!

It was at that moment a word from the Lord came to my heart. *“Kevin, as you spend time with Me I am going to give you solutions and strategies that will allow things to be fixed and put in order quickly.”* And He has been doing that ever since! God has some divine strategies for your future, family, business, and ministry. You’ll discover them in the secret place—in times of prayer!

Here are a couple simple tips that will help you get the most out of your time of prayer in the secret place.

**1. Carve out a block of time to meet with God every day!**

*But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

*Matthew 6:6 NKJV*

Pick a place where you can close the door and shut out distractions. Pick a specific place and time. I would encourage you to give God the best part of your day. Don't give Him the leftovers of your day...give Him your best! Years ago, I used to try and meet with the Lord at the end of my day. But I was always exhausted. I would inevitably end up falling asleep while reading my Bible. The best part of my day, and the most uninterrupted part of my day, is the morning.

So for years it has become a holy habit to get up before the sun and while most are sleeping, I'm pursuing friendship with the King of

Kings! It really is the best part of my day. And in giving God the best part of my day, I've learned I am positioning myself to hear His voice all day long!

## 2. Thank Him.

*Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!  
His faithful love endures forever. Has the  
LORD redeemed you? Then speak out!*

*Psalm 107:1–2a NLT*

Take time to thank God; speak out with a heart of thanksgiving, pondering all of the amazing things He has done. I thank God for my family, for the relationships in my life, for saving me, for filling my life with hope. Taking time to think about all God has done, the amazing miracles He has done, His amazing ability to create something out of nothing, causes my heart to be filled with faith. And it's with this heart of faith that I begin to...

## 3. Ask.

*Listen to my voice in the morning, LORD.  
Each morning I bring my requests to you  
and wait expectantly.*

*Psalm 5:3 NLT*

I have created what I call my “Asking Big List.” This is where I have listed the top ten

things I'm asking the Lord for. I have found verses that clearly show that what I'm asking for is indeed God's will. Remember, God is big...so ask big! I daily ask God for specific things in three areas of my life: The Man—my personal life; the Marriage—wife and family; the Ministry—the opportunity that God has given me to serve in His Kingdom. Then it's time to wait and...

#### 4. Listen.

*He wakes me up in the morning,  
wakes me up, opens my ears to listen  
as one ready to take orders.*

*Isaiah 50:4 MSG*

*Here's what I want: Give me a God-  
listening heart...*

*1 Kings 3:9 MSG*

God wants to talk to you! He has something to tell you, but it requires that you listen. Some people think only preachers or more “spiritual” people hear from God. That's simply not true! God speaks to His children—because He loves them—not because they are so spiritual.

One day during hunting season, as I sat out in the woods quietly listening for a deer, I had a thought fill my heart. It just seemed crazy to me that I had been sitting out in the woods for hours

just listening. I paid attention to every sound, discerning if it was a deer or just a squirrel running through the woods. I could not help but begin to pray, asking God to give me ears to hear His voice, asking the Holy Spirit to teach me to wait and listen.

How crazy it would be to wait for hours just to hear an animal but not wait for something as important as hearing the voice of the Lord. Oh, that we would learn to listen to the voice of God! One Word from God has the power to change a marriage, save a life, point you in the right direction, rescue you from danger and so much more. Make sure you take time to quietly wait and listen for the most important voice you will ever hear.

One early morning when I was in Australia, I went for a walk on the beach. I saw the beauty of the ocean and then noticed an amazing little waterfall. I stopped to say, “Lord, thank you for the beauty of your creation. This is just beautiful!” And just then, I heard the Lord drop a word in my heart. *“Kevin, you are beautiful—you are My creation.”* At that I almost dropped to my knees! I was thinking... *But God, I know me; I know how jacked up I am, how imperfect I am, how apart from you I can do absolutely nothing*



*good.* That moment was powerful...to have the Lord tell me what He thinks about me. That is life changing.

I love to take a journal and write down my conversations with the Lord. I don't want to forget what the Lord speaks to me, so I take time to put it in writing. I refer to those journals often and find that those words from the Lord fill me with faith and courage.

Lastly, I love to take time to...

## 5. **Behold Him.**

*Be still, and know that I am God!*

*Psalm 46:10 NLT*

Remember, the essence of prayer is all about relationship. It's all about knowing God personally. It's not about how much of the Bible you read or about going through your list of requests. There is something amazing about just taking time to behold Him. When you see a beautiful sunset, you stop and take it in. You stand in amazement at how beautiful it is. How much more powerful it is when we simply take time to behold the King of Kings. We stop and take notice of His strength, kindness, mercy, power, and love. It's in these holy moments that we begin to move to a whole new level of depth in our relationship with God.

***You can read your Bible and pray and still never know God.***

Religious leaders called Pharisees read scripture. They were known for their long prayers. But they did not know God. In fact, they were so oblivious to who God was that they had His Son, Jesus, crucified on a cross. They had God right in front of them...and just couldn't see Him.

I like to take time when I am in the secret place—that place of prayer—to simply say, “Lord, I want to know You! More than anything or anybody, I must know You!” I stand amazed at His beauty, strength and love. Then I ask Him, “What’s on Your heart today?”

***Prayer:*** *Father, I ask for a God-listening heart...for ears that hear Your voice. I ask that as I set aside time to meet with You, I will be positioning myself to hear Your voice all day long! Thank You for this holy invitation to come and talk with You. My heart responds, “Lord, I’m coming!” Amen.*

## Action Steps

1. **Pick a specific place and a specific time when you are going to meet with God in the secret place.** Now stick with it for 21 days. In 21 days you can create a new holy habit.

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2. **List some things you are thankful for that God has given you.**

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3. **Create your own “Ask Big List.”** List the top ten things you want to ask the Lord for. Over time, look for Scriptures that confirm what you are asking for is indeed God’s will for you.

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# The Bible

## There Are Treasures in God's Word

Congratulations...you have been learning about, and experiencing, God's invitation to friendship. By now you have learned the great value of the secret place—regular times of prayer and being in God's presence. Now we come to another mile marker in your spiritual journey: the treasure of God's Word.

*I rejoice at Your word as one who finds  
great treasure.*

*Psalm 119:162 NKJV*

*Your word have I hidden in my heart,  
That I might not sin against You.*

*Psalm 119:11 NKJV*

King David painted a great picture for us. Picture yourself back in the days of pirates. You have been at sea for months in search of treasure. Then it happens...you enter into yet another cave. But this time it's different; it's full of treasure. I mean there are treasure chests everywhere! They are full of gold, coins, jewelry...piles and piles of treasure. You can't help but jump up and down with joy! This is the picture King

David gave us of his discovery of the treasure of God's Word...as though he couldn't help but jump up and down with joy over what God had spoken to his heart.

This, my friend, is an experience meant for you and me every day as we dive into the Word of God. There are treasures in there just waiting to be discovered. Every year there are 44 million Bibles sold. The Bible is the best seller of all time! So what's the big deal with the Bible? Why is it so many people in America and around the world read it? In the Bible you discover the treasure of God's voice.

That's right; the Bible offers you and me a chance to hear from the Maker of Heaven and Earth. God is alive and well and He has some very important things to tell you. The Bible tells us that God has thoughts about you...so many thoughts they can't even be counted.

*How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!*

*Psalm 139:17 NLT*

God is thinking about you today. You matter to God, and His thoughts about you are good. It is in God's Word, the Bible, that you discover so much of what God has to say to you. One word from God can spark enthusiasm in you, heal a broken marriage, pour courage into you, give you the wisdom and knowledge you need to walk in success, peace, and prosperity. As you read God's Word every day, you can expect the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart and teach you some great treasures that have the ability to propel your life forward. Take a look at just a few of the many treasures that are just waiting for you in God's Word. The treasure of knowing that:

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**“ You matter to God,  
and His thoughts about  
you are good. ”**

.....

- **You are His child.**

Wow! This will be one of the greatest spiritual lessons you will ever wrap your mind around. As a child of the King, you have royalty in your DNA!

*See how very much our Father loves us,  
for he calls us his children, and that is  
what we are!*

*1 John 3:1a NLT*

- **You can make a comeback.**

Many of God's "greats" are normal people who made some poor choices. But when they fell down, they refused to stay down. They learned how to make a comeback. If you drop the ball, if you say something you should not have said or do something you should not have done, as one of God's dearly loved children you will find that He is not looking down at you...He is looking for you! He is rooting for your comeback!

*For though I fall, I will rise again.*

*Micah 7:8b NLT*

- **God is teaching you and directing your steps.**

I've learned that when I go fishing in areas I normally don't fish in it's always best to have a guide. I went fishing one summer in the Gulf of Mexico with Captain Roy and I had a blast! He knew just the right bait to use, the right spots where to fish. I simply had to trust him and follow his lead. This is such good news! You have the best guide possible for your life—God Himself promises to teach you what is best for your life and to lead you into the very center of His best!

*I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow.*

*Isaiah 48:17b NLT*

## **Garbage In—Garbage Out**

Your mind is like a computer. What you put in is what will come out. Think about this for a minute...what do you put into your mind? Did you know that the average person sees 200,000 violent acts and 16,000 murders on television by the age of 18?

I was in an airport in Japan when I picked up a *Time Magazine*. The cover story grabbed my attention. It was a story about a little 6-year-old boy from Flint, Michigan, who went to



school and shot his 6-year-old classmate to death. I asked myself, “Where would a little boy so young get an idea like that? What was going on in his mind?”

Reporters were told by his father that the boy loved to watch violent movies. You see, garbage was put in his mind...and garbage came out. Am I saying that as a follower of Jesus you should not watch TV or go to movies? Of course not. But I am saying that we need to be wise about what we allow into our minds. And we need to put the Word of God in our minds to clean up all the garbage that has snuck its way in there.

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you...*

*Romans 12:2a NLT*

Now let me give you some practical tips on reading your Bible:

1. **Find a Bible that is easy to read.** I like to read the New Living Translation.
2. **Take advantage of some of the great resources that are available on your computer, tablet, or mobile phone.** I use the *You Version* app every day. There are several translations to choose from. I also have the *Blue Letter Bible* app. This gives me access to commentaries and studies of the Greek and Hebrew languages, which give some incredible word pictures which will bless you. (The New Testament was written in Greek and the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and sometimes our English words have a hard time capturing the same meanings.)
3. **Take time to read the Bible every day.** You see, champions do regularly what others do occasionally. So make reading the Bible a regular part of your daily routine, just like with prayer.
4. **Plan what you will read.** Don't leave what you will read up to chance. Instead approach your Bible reading with a plan. If you are working out, you go to the gym with a plan. You know before you get there what kind of workout you will do. There are several great Bible reading plans like the

**One Year Bible.** Give one of them a try.

5. **When you read your Bible - look for a person, not just principles!** You are going after a relationship and knowing God intimately. As you read through your Bible, look for the person of God. Discover His character, His power, what He likes and dislikes. In doing so, you are getting to know God better. Talk with Him about your discoveries and feel free to ask Him questions.
6. **Make a commitment to apply what you read in God's Word.** God is more interested with how much you obey His Word than He is with how much you read.

*But don't just listen to God's word.*

*You must do what it says...*

*James 1:22a NLT*

**Prayer:** *Father, I thank You for Your Word. People sacrificed their lives so that I would be able to read Your Holy Word. I thank You that Your Word is alive; it's active. Your Word brings me faith. Open up my eyes to see all the wonderful truths of Your Word and show me how to apply them to my life. As I read Your Word, I'm looking for You. Teach me, Holy Spirit. Amen.*

# Action Steps

- 1. Purchase a Bible that is easy to read.**  
Check out [www.youversion.com](http://www.youversion.com) to download an app that will give you access to several Bible versions for free.
- 2. Pick out a Bible reading plan.**  
Check out the *One Year Bible* at [www.oneyearbibleonline.com](http://www.oneyearbibleonline.com).



# The Church

## The Hope of the World

By now you have discovered some great secrets to having a thriving relationship with God. God is all about friendship and relationship, not rules and religion. You've discovered the power of prayer—talking with the Lord every day—and the treasure of the Bible, God's Word. There is another key to your personal growth as a follower of Jesus—the local church!

God loves the Church! Jesus gave His life for the Church, rose from the dead for the Church, He empowered the Church with His Holy Spirit, and even today He intercedes for the Church. And He's coming back for the Church! If the local church is a big deal to Jesus...it ought to be a pretty big deal to us too.

The reality is, we cannot grow the way God intended us to grow apart from the local church. Over the years, I have heard people say things like, "Don't go to church—just be the Church." They use this as an excuse to not be an active part of a local church. Maybe they have had a bad experience in a church. But here's the thing:

***You cannot grow in Christ and be cut off from  
His body at the same time.***

Jesus referred to the Church as His body. You cannot be “in” Christ and separate from His body, the Church. The truth is that we are to do both: GO to church and BE the Church. We are to carry the presence of God with us everywhere we go, changing the atmosphere around us!

*Night and day, while he's asleep or awake,  
the seed sprouts and grows, but he does  
not understand how it happens. The earth  
produces the crops on its own.*

*Mark 4:27–28a NLT*

The farmer focuses on making sure the seed is exposed to the right environments—sun, water, and good soil. Then growth takes place all by itself; “the earth produces the crops on its own.” The seed’s growth is entirely wrapped up in it being in the right environment...and so it is with our growth! Think about this for a minute. If you put a baby great white shark in a saltwater tank it will only grow to the size of its environment. If you put that shark in the ocean it will grow to its full potential. You have “great white shark potential,” but you need to get into the right environment to reach your full poten-

tial in Christ. I like the way Dr. Caroline Leaf puts it; she said, “There is no expiration date on your potential.”

There are environments within the local church that are designed by God to bring growth to your life. Here are a few environments you will want to intentionally put yourself in on a regular basis.

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**“There is no  
expiration date on  
your potential.”**

.....

### **A Worship Experience Environment**

Every week, followers of Jesus gather around the world to worship Jesus and hear His Word taught. And when you put yourself in



a Bible-believing church—you are in an environment that is going to cause your faith to grow! To avoid this environment is to stunt your growth.

*So faith comes from hearing, that is,  
hearing the Good News about Christ.*

*Romans 10:17 NLT*

*And let us not neglect our meeting  
together as some people do, but encourage  
one another, especially now that the day  
of his return is drawing near.*

*Hebrews 10:25 NLT*

USA Today reported that 48% of church-goers attend services an average of once a month. They are stunting their own spiritual growth. Some think, “I’ll go to church when I feel like I need it.” Trust me...you need to be in God’s house. You need the atmosphere of God’s presence that is experienced in corporate worship. You need the faith that comes as you hear the message of God’s Word being preached. And you need the ministry that comes from the body of Christ. The message of the prophet Haggai is simple, yet powerful: PUT GOD’S HOUSE FIRST!

## A Smaller Relational Environment

It is in God's house—the local church—that you are going to discover some great relationships that will help you grow in Christ. You see, people are not helped by programs but by other people.

***Nobody succeeds spiritually alone.***

*All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the LORD's Supper), and to prayer.*

*Acts 2:42 NLT*

When you devote yourself to something, you give constant attention to it. I think most of us understand that we need to give constant attention to things like teaching and prayer, and who doesn't like to eat? But why fellowship? What is fellowship, anyway? Fellowship speaks of an intimate relational bond between Christians.

Wow! The disciples of Jesus in the beginning of the local church gave complete attention to godly relationships. To be a believer in the New Testament meant belonging. Believing and belonging went hand in hand. This was the key to their success and growth—and it's the key to ours today.

***Your spiritual growth has everything to do with  
the PEOPLE in your life!***

Years ago, I went to Gold's Gym to meet a friend. He didn't show up that day, so I thought I'd go ahead and work out on my own. I went to the bench press area, slapped on some weights, and started working out.

Everything was going fine until I realized I had put on too many weights, and with a barbell across my chest, I was stuck. I just couldn't lift that thing one more time. I thought, *Well, I could just lean over to the side and the weights would fall off, but then I would make a big scene.* As I lay there contemplating how I was going to get out of that jam, an extremely large guy with arms about the size of my thighs walked up to me and asked if I would like some help. I managed to squeak out one word, "Yep." At that he lifted the weights off me. That was slightly embarrassing to say the least!

I learned a couple important things that day: Don't try to lift that much weight when you are alone. And, I can lift more weight when I have a workout partner.

Godly friendships are like having a workout partner. You are challenged to go farther, dream a little bigger, and put in a little more effort. You can do more together than you could ever do

alone. I think people are crazy who think they don't need church, don't need to belong, don't need people...saying, "Give me Jesus and my Bible and I'll be just fine!" I don't think so.

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**“ You can do  
more together than  
you could ever  
do alone. ”**

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When it was just Adam and God together in the Garden of Eden, it *seems* like that should have been perfect. But even God looked at that and said it was not good that man was alone. We have been wired by God for relationships. Everyone needs someone to help them reach their full potential. In the Bible, Paul needed Barnabas; Timothy needed Paul. And I need Pastor Dave Williams in my life. As a young teenager, he saw something in me I didn't even see

in myself—potential. I thank God for the people that He has used to help me become all He has called me to be.

*As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.*

*Proverbs 27:17 NLT*

***Every friendship we have either nurtures strength or weakness in us.***

## **A Serving Environment**

This is where your faith gets stretched and you get in the game. You become a participant, not a spectator.

*He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*

*Ephesians 4:16 NLT*

According to God's Word, you have a divine calling to help others grow. Each part—each person—has a special work that helps the

others grow. That's why for years at Mount Hope Church we have said, "Every member is a minister." The next time someone asks me how many ministers we have, I'm going to say "thousands." Because we all have a part to play, we are all ministers! That means we should come to church with something to give to someone—an encouraging word, a prayer, a smile, something that will lift them. We all should be active participants in the local church.

*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

*Ephesians 2:10 NLT*

*A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.*

*1 Corinthians 12:7 NLT*

*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.*

*1 Peter 4:10 NLT*

This tells us that we all have a gift, and our gift is not for us! It's to be used to help somebody else. That's why I often say...

***No one should ever have to look any farther than you to find love and compassion.***

We are invited to partner with the Holy Spirit to change the world and transform lives, one person at a time! I love to watch the Mount Hope Church family function as ministers. From business owners and doctors to busy moms and dads, every week by the hundreds, they show up to serve. They show up to Champion's Club on Saturdays and through love and kindness they are changing the destiny of young children all over our community.

On Tuesdays, the Into the Streets team faithfully shows up to feed the homeless, partnering with Heaven to transform people's lives and give hope to people who desperately need it. From Kidz Connect, Spyn Student Ministries, intercessors in the Global Prayer Center, to being part of bringing restoration to a marriage that

has tanked out, ordinary people just like you and me roll up their sleeves and partner with the Holy Spirit to do the extraordinary.

*Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent.*

*Hebrews 6:11–12a NLT*

Loving others actually keeps you from becoming spiritually dull! If you want to grow spiritually, if you want to stay away from becoming dull, the Word of God is clear—be an active part of the local church!

Once, a man was swimming in the ocean, and he saw a young boy out in the water struggling. The power of the waves was just too much for the boy, and he was going under. The man swam out to him, grabbed hold of him, and after much effort, made it back to the beach and just collapsed. The boy, catching his breath, said, “Thank you.” The man, gaining his composure, said, “Sure...now go and live a life that was worth saving.”



Praise God, we have been rescued from the results of sin! Now, let's go live a life that is worth saving—a life spent investing in the people that God loves so dearly.

The Church is the hope of the world. Think about this: Jesus came into the world and said, *“I am the light of the world. I am the salt of the earth.”* Then, after spending three years with His twelve disciples, He looked at them and said, *“Tag—you're it! You are the light of the world; you are the salt of the earth.”*

What does light do to darkness? It changes it! It transforms a dark room into a light room.

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**“The Church is the  
hope of the world.”**

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It changes the atmosphere wherever it shines. This is what the Church is meant to do. We are meant to change the atmosphere and the culture around us. The local church is not called to just have meetings every Sunday. We

are called to change the culture around us! We are to affect the arts, media, business, education, and the family!

***Prayer:** Father, I thank You that You have made me part of Your family—the Church. I thank You for directing me to a Bible-believing church that honors You. Grant me the wisdom to intentionally put myself into the environments in Your Church that will bring growth to my life. Help me, Holy Spirit, to become all You have created me to be. Teach me what gifts You have given me. Teach me how to use those gifts to serve others. Amen.*

## Action Steps

- 1. Make a commitment to consistently attend and be part of a local church.**  
Remember, you cannot grow in Christ and be cut off from His body at the same time.
- 2. Intentionally connect with some people that are a bit farther along the road in their walk with Christ than you are.** Join a small group or attend a Bible study class. In these settings, start to look for a spiritual workout partner—someone who is going to challenge you. Relationships are like an elevator—they will either take you up or take you down. Develop some friendships with people that are going to take you up to a new level of growth.
- 3. Stop spectating and start participating.** Within a local church, offer to volunteer and serve others with the unique gifts that God has given you. You have a personality; you have gifts given to you by God. The Bible teaches us that the body of Christ is not complete without you. If you are concerned about making a long-term commitment, no problem...just “test drive” a couple areas of ministry. Your heart will soon land you in just the right serving opportunity.

# You Have a Story to Tell

## You Are on the “Grace Plan”

One year when my family was in Florida, our daughter Sarah asked if we could go parasailing. Well...I had never gone before for a reason—I don't like heights! When I've watched this from the beach I think that parasailing resembles fly fishing for sharks...only people are the bait. I've seen them flop in the water and get pulled back up in the air as if to tease the sharks. I wanted no part of that. Maybe I have watched the movie *Jaws* one too many times.

Well, my daughter has a way of pulling my heartstrings, and I reluctantly agreed to go. Before I knew it, there we were dangling 450 feet in the air behind this boat. Looking down at the water I said, “Sarah look...that looks like a huge shark, maybe even a whale.” She said, “Dad... that's just our shadow.” I guess I was a little high-strung. Well, we made it back onto the boat safely, we were alive, we had not become shark bait, and I was happy to have my feet back on the boat. And then it happened.

The owner of the boat helped my daughter out of the harness, but told me to stay in my seat. He explained that there was another man who wanted to go parasailing, and he could not go alone because they have to send people in pairs. He wanted me to go up again. I was thinking, *I didn't want to go the first time with my own daughter. I certainly don't want to go again with some guy I don't even know.*

But those thoughts never turned into words, and before I knew it I was 450 feet in the air once again. I started up a conversation with the gentleman sitting next to me. We exchanged names and a little small talk. Then Dan really threw me a curveball. He said, "I had a friend who went parasailing, and he actually became detached from the boat, crashed into a building, and died." I thought, *Dan, WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS? I'm uncomfortable up here to begin with!* But instead of venting my frustration, I saw an opportunity I just could not pass up.

I threw a silent prayer up to the Lord and then said to Dan, "I have a question for you. Imagine this: Let's say we become detached from the boat and then we fly into that building on the beach and Dan dies. So, what happens to Dan?"

He paused briefly and said, “Well, I would go to Heaven.” “Great,” I replied, “but how do you know you’d end up in Heaven?” He answered, “Well, I know one thing—you don’t have to go to church to get there. I’m not a perfect person, but I’ve done a lot of good things and hopefully it’s enough.”

About this time, the guys on the boat started reeling us down. With limited time, I quickly said, “Dan, I’ve got to tell you something. Think about it—who could ever be good enough to get to Heaven? It’s impossible—none of us could pull that off. I’ve tried it, and it just doesn’t work. That’s what I call the works plan. The good news is you can get off that plan and get on the grace plan. The Bible says it’s by God’s grace, not by works, that a person can be saved. It’s by placing our faith in God’s Son, Jesus, and what He has done for us. So it’s not about how good *we* are... it’s about how good *Jesus* is. That is God’s ‘Plan A’ for getting us into Heaven and, by the way, there is no ‘Plan B.’”

The truth is that I am saved. I am a child of God. Not because I’m so good. Not because I’ve done so many great things. I am saved because Jesus, God’s Son, is good. He paid the penalty of sin for me. I’m so glad I’m on the grace plan, not the works plan!

Friend, you have a story to tell. If you are on God's grace plan, you have an amazing story to tell about how God's grace, not your own works, has saved you...how your life has been transformed by the power of the Good News of Jesus. There is an anointing on your story. God wants to use your story of His amazing grace to transform the lives of other people.

Life is a collection of several story lines—experiences you have had. In your story, you have some great chapters and some great memories. And most have some chapters that aren't so good...things you wish never happened, but they did.

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**“There is  
an anointing on  
your story.”**

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My story includes a pretty rough beginning right from birth. I was just too big to come out of the birth canal as quickly as I should have...I was

stuck. When I finally made my way into this bright world, doctors told my parents that I would likely have brain damage. Praise God, there was no brain damage; however, through my elementary school years I suffered from horrible seizures. I was in and out of hospitals. In my teenage years I would not go out for sports, not because I didn't like sports, but I was afraid to be in front of people. I was afraid that the seizures that dominated my early life would happen again.

But all that changed when I met Jesus! My fear was replaced by faith. I had once been held captive by fear; I held myself back from doing so many things because of fear. But God in His goodness set me free and filled me with faith! I know my Heavenly Father and He is good! And the guy that used to hide behind the crowds has since stepped up to the plate and begun living out his destiny—which just happens to include being in front of people on a regular basis! I find that hilarious!

I have been saved by God's grace. I have been adopted into God's family by God's grace. I have been called by God, and by His grace, I have answered that call. My life, before I personally placed faith in God's Son, was pretty messed up.



I had been marked as a broken person. But, by God's amazing grace, I now have been marked by God's favor and blessings!

***Your anointed story has the power to trigger belief, faith, and hope in others.***

You may never find yourself parasailing with a person who thinks his good works are going to get him to Heaven. But every day of your life, there are opportunities for you to tell your story. Let me give you some practical help in telling other people your story.

- **Get familiar with your story.**

Everybody has a story to tell. Sometimes people think unless their story seems very dramatic, it's just not powerful. Well, that's just not true! You don't have to have a story about being strung out on drugs for years to have a powerful story. If you have had your sins forgiven... if you have experienced the love of God...if you have been adopted as one of God's dearly loved children...you have a powerful, dramatic story to tell. But you will never tell your personal story if you are not familiar with it. So take time to get familiar with your own story of how God's amazing grace has saved you.

And here's the great thing about your story—people cannot argue with your per-

sonal experience. You are just telling what you know has personally happened to you! All of us can briefly tell people what we were like before we met Jesus, and then what we are like after Jesus. We can tell how every person is in need of a Savior. In the Bible, the disciples of Jesus simply told their stories of what they had personally experienced.

- **Focus on the positive.**

One of the things I've noticed is that some people focus the majority of their storytelling on how messed up their lives were before Jesus and spend very little time talking about what Jesus has done for them. I recommend that you spend more time talking about what God has done *for* you and less time talking about how messed up your life was.

I think of the story the Bible tells of a woman caught in adultery. She was about to be stoned to death for her unfaithfulness when Jesus stepped in and said, "Let the person without sin cast the first stone." As all the people walked away one by one, Jesus asked her, "Where are your accusers now? Go and sin no more." She left, blown away by her encounter with grace, true love, forgiveness, and a second chance at life.

When she told her story to others, I imagine she focused more on the outrageous love and forgiveness that she experienced... the kind of love that instead of pointing the finger in condemnation, pointed her to hope and forgiveness. I don't think she went on and on about how messed up her life was as an adulteress...sleeping with this man and then that man. No, I think she went on and on about the love and mercy she experienced firsthand. That, my friend, is powerful!

- **In your own words write down why a person needs Jesus.**

The reality is we all need a Savior. We are all in the same boat—we ALL have sinned, and the result of sin is death. We can't save ourselves. God has one plan for man to be saved and that is through placing faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. You see, He died, was buried, and rose again from the dead to pay the penalty for sin. So being right with God is never about how good we are...it's always about how good Jesus is. A person may have been baptized as an

infant, they may have been confirmed as a child, they may *know* all the right things...but it's only through faith in Jesus that we can be saved!

- **Be Jesus with skin on.**

Be like Jesus to the people that you come in contact with. No one should ever have to look farther than you for compassion. Hey, most people don't need you to point out their faults... most people know their faults already. They are painfully aware of them. So instead of telling people they are going to Hell, instead of telling them to "turn or burn," allow them to see Jesus in you through your words and actions. Let them see how you are different; how you respond to criticism, unkind words, and harsh treatment. They will be blown away to see how things work in the Kingdom—that we love our enemies, we do good to those who do us wrong. We respond to harshness with kindness.

*The more you are like everyone else in the world, the less impact you will ever have on the world.*

- **Look for opportunities.**

Around us every day are opportunities. Ask God for them and then look for them.

One day, I was in a local restaurant and the young man working the cash register told me that his wrist was hurting. I realized there was no one in line behind me, so I simply asked if I could pray with him. He said yes! I had genuine concern about the pain he was suffering and asked Jesus to heal his body. In about 30 seconds I was able to communicate compassion and the fact that God cares!

Another day, I was in a meeting with a local businessman. Out of the blue, he started talking about how he wasn't sure if he was going to Heaven, not sure where he would end up. He was not sure *where* he was even supposed to end up—Heaven or Hell. He talked about how he tried to do a lot of good things and hoped that would do the trick. If there was ever a glaring opportunity staring me in the face, there it was.

Just like Dan in my parasailing experience, I quickly told this businessman that he was on the works plan—the plan where you try and do a bunch of good things in hopes you'll get to Heaven. But here's the thing—the works plan never works. I read Ephesians 2:8 to him and told him about the grace plan. I shared that it's through faith in Jesus that man can be saved. That is God's 'Plan A' and there is no 'Plan B,' and here's the deal—the grace plan works!

This week look for opportunities and you will find they are around you every day. Remember, you have a story to tell...so tell it with a smile. And then let the Holy Spirit do what only He can do to draw people to Jesus. Invite someone to church, offer to pray for someone, tell someone about God's grace plan. It's that easy!

***Prayer:** Father, I thank You that You have given me a story to tell. It's a story about Your amazing grace. It's a story about my experience with Your love, Your mercy, and Your goodness. How can I help but tell what I have seen and heard? I ask that You grant me opportunities even this week to be Jesus with skin on to someone. I ask You to direct my words and my actions so that I represent You well. Thank You, Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## Action Steps

1. **Get familiar enough with your story to tell it in about 1–2 minutes.** Ask yourself a couple questions: What was I like before I met Jesus Christ? (Before my sins were forgiven and I was adopted into God's family. Before I had a personal experience with the love of God.) Take time to articulate this part in about 15–30 seconds.
2. **Now ask an even more important question: What is my life like now that I have met Jesus? What has changed?**
3. **Write your story...**keep it short, simple, and filled with hope. Include what you were like before Jesus, what you are like after meeting Jesus, and why the person you are talking to needs Jesus.







# Momentum

## The Grace of Giving

You are off to a great start in your spiritual journey! You are developing your friendship with God; you are talking with Him in prayer and discovering treasures in God's Word—the Bible. You are attending a Bible-believing church, and you are being the Church every day. You have taken the time to articulate your story of God's amazing grace in your life.

Now there is one more thing I want to talk to you about that is very important to the momentum in your spiritual journey.

Several years ago, I was driving down the highway for a breakfast meeting with a friend. It was winter, and the roads were slick when it happened—I hit a sheet of ice and started sliding out of control. I lost traction; I went back and forth from one side of the road to the other. I did what all smart people do in a situation like that...I prayed! "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" I ended up getting hit by a semi-truck and found myself stuck in the median. I had no injuries and there was not even much damage to my vehicle, but I was stuck.

This is where so many people end up in life. They get off to a good start, but somewhere along the line they lose traction...they lose momentum. Now they are just stuck spinning their wheels and getting nowhere fast.

Driving experts say that when you do what's called over-steering (which is what I did), you have to go against your natural tendencies and actually steer into the skid. Did you know that often God calls us to go against our natural tendencies? It's true that if we want to keep momentum and avoid being stuck in life, often we have to go against what we naturally think we should do.

Do you want to be great in this life? The culture around us says you must fight your way to the top. In God's Kingdom culture, you have to go against your natural tendencies and be a servant to others. If someone has done you wrong, the culture around us says to get revenge. In Kingdom culture, you must bless those who wrong you and do them good. This often goes totally against our natural tendencies in those situations. Do you want to get ahead in life? The culture around us acts like the seagull screaming "MINE, MINE, MINE." In Kingdom culture we are called to give.

It might surprise you to discover that the momentum you have in life is linked to what you do with money and the things God has blessed you with. Your momentum is linked to your giving...not your getting. The fact is, if you are not giving, you are not growing.

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**“If you are not giving, you are not growing.”**

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The apostle Paul said he worked hard to present mature people to God. God wants us to grow up in the faith, to become mature. Our level of giving reveals our level of maturity. Just look at little kids and often you hear, “Mine!” and we don’t think that’s odd because, after all, they are only kids. They still have to learn to share and to give. But if you are sitting at a conference room table in a business meeting and you reach across the table to use a pen and a man in a suit grabs

it from you and says, “MINE!” you know he has some issues. He has to grow up and learn to share...he has to learn to give.

In Luke 3:10-14, we see three different groups of people who came to John the Baptist and essentially said, “Hey, we’re stuck in life. Life is not moving in the direction it needs go.” What did John the Baptist do? He talked to them about their money, their “stuff!”

This is amazing...they didn’t ask one question about money or their possessions, yet each answer had everything to do with how they handled the money and the possessions they had.

***Your attitude toward money is central to the momentum in your life.***

Some people think that when it comes to giving, they should spend, then save some money, and then give if there is any left over. Well here’s the thing—God doesn’t want your leftovers. We are supposed to give to God first!

*Seek the Kingdom of God [first] above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*

*Matthew 6:33 [brackets added] NLT*

As a follower of Jesus, it is in your nature to give. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, Jesus. When you find yourself giving, it's God's nature in you being expressed!

So where do you start in giving? The starting point in giving for a follower of Jesus is what the Bible calls the tithe. The tithe is just the beginning—it's kind of like taking “baby steps” in giving. The word tithe means a tenth. It's not an optional amount of money; it is 10% of your gross income. The fact is, God gives us 10% more than we really need as a test. He wants to see if we will put Him first.

The tithe does not go to our favorite television ministry. It does not go to pay for our kids' private schools. The tithe is to be brought to the storehouse—the temple. Today, that is the local church, the place where you are being fed God's Word. It is the place where godly leaders are responsible for your soul. Here is what the Bible says about the tithe:

*Bring this tithe to the designated place of worship.... Doing this will teach you always to fear the LORD your God.*

*Deuteronomy 14:23a,c NLT*

*“...I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me.”*

*Genesis 28:22b NLT*

*One-tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD and must be set apart to him as holy.*

*Leviticus 27:30 NLT*

*“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!”*

*Malachi 3:10 NLT*

It always amazes me that some will say, “Well, the tithe was in the Old Testament, and we are no longer under the law, we are under

grace now.” This is used as an excuse not to give. Well, this just doesn’t hold up to God’s Word for a few reasons:

**1. Tithing is a scriptural principle that began 430 years before the law.**

Tithing is not tied to the law. And even Jesus, who came to fulfill the law, said in Matthew 23:23, you ought to tithe. So it’s not just in the Old Testament and it is not just a law. If God said you should bring Him the first 10% of your income, and if Jesus said you ought to tithe...I’m thinking it’s pretty important to tithe!

**2. Jesus always raised the bar from what was required under the law; He never lowered the bar!**

What would you think of someone who said, “Hey, I know adultery was forbidden under the law, but now that we are under grace, we don’t have to obey that law!” You would think they were crazy, not the sharpest tool in the shed. The law said not to commit adultery. Jesus came along and raised the bar and said in Matthew 5:28, not to even *look* at a woman lustfully. The law said you should not murder; Jesus raised the bar and said in Matthew 5:22 to not even get angry with your brother.

**3. The fact is, nowhere in the Bible does it**



**ever say you don't have to tithe.**

In fact, in 2 Corinthians 8:7, Paul said, "See that you also excel in this grace of giving..." We are called to excel in giving...not go backwards when it comes to giving!

Again, tithing is just the starting place for giving. It's the beginning, not the end.

*"Tithing is like a toddler's first steps: they aren't his last or best steps, but they are a good start."*

—*Randy Alcorn*

So if you have given your life to Christ and want to put Him first, where do you start? Tithe. Start with 10%...it's taking the baby steps.

Did you catch God's promise for those who put their trust in Him, for those who put Him to the test and bring the tithe? He said He would open up the windows of Heaven and pour out a blessing so great that you won't have enough room to contain it all. Wow! Then He went on to say, "TRY IT! Put me to the test" (Malachi 3:10).

Hey, God doesn't need your money. Think about it—He's God! He owns everything...it's all His anyway. But here's the thing: *You* need to be blessed!

***So while the world around is focused on their standard of living, God calls us to be focused on our standard of giving.***

Will you put the Lord to the test today? Try it! Take the “Trust Me Challenge” and put God first in your giving. Don’t give God what’s left over at the end of the month...commit to giving to God first. How much? Start with the tithe—the first 10% of your income. Then buckle your seat belt and get ready for the adventure of a lifetime as you begin to grow in the grace of giving!

Years ago, Renee and I made a decision that we were going to put God first in our giving. We started with baby steps and brought to the Lord the first 10% of our income. Sure, there were times in the early years that we didn’t have very much...but we were faithful with whatever we had. We quickly moved on to giving offerings to help support missionaries and feed the poor. The result of that is—WE ARE BLESSED! We have experienced firsthand the blessings of God.

Know that every action of obedience in your life is a momentum maker and that certainly includes your trust and obedience in giving.

2 Chronicles 16:9 teaches us that God's eyes are scanning the earth, just looking for someone who will trust Him. Why? So He can bless them! I pray God's eyes find you!

***Prayer:** Father, I thank You for Your Word and I want to declare that my trust is in You. I'm putting my money where my mouth is. I realize all that I have is from You, so in view of all You have done for me; I gladly bring to You the first 10% of my income. It's with joy that I will give offerings. I do this to show that I put You first in my life. I do this to honor You. And I ask that You will do what You said You would do. Go ahead and open the windows of Heaven over my life, my household, and pour out blessings. Bless me so that I can continue to be a blessing to others. Thank you! Amen.*

## Action Steps

- 1. Determine what 10% of your income is—then commit to bring it consistently to the Lord’s House—your local church.** Take the “Trust Me Challenge.” Let the Lord know you trust Him and you are going to put Him to the test just like He asked you to do.
- 2. Ask the Lord to help you grow in this grace of giving.** Ask Him to work in you a generous heart...a heart just like His!
- 3. Go out and buy a blessing journal.** This was one of the best gifts we ever received. We have kept a record of God’s blessings for over 28 years. Keep a record of all the ways God is going to open up the windows of Heaven and pour out blessings on you. It’s a blast to go through the journal year after year and be just blown away at the many ways God has blessed you!
- 4. If you have debt...get violent with it.** Develop a plan of action to reduce your debt. Watch God bless your obedience in giving and help you get out of the debt trap.



# Keeping on the Move

## Mile Markers on Your Journey

One summer, I had a blast spending time with my grandson, Tanner, for his first season of T-ball. What a riot it was to watch a bunch of four-year-olds learn how to play baseball. When they finally were able to hit the ball, they needed clear direction as to what was next, where to go from there. I watched as one little four-year-old connected with the ball. The coach yelled for him to run...so he took off like a lightning bolt.

But then he stopped at first base and the coach yelled for him to go to second base. Well, the kid didn't even know what second base was, let alone where it was, so he just stood there. There was a look of frustration on the boy's face. It was like he knew he was supposed to do something else...there was another place to go... he just had no idea where it was. So he settled for just hanging around first base.

***If you stay where you are, then where you are is where you will always be.***

This is what so many young believers in Jesus do. They get off to a great start, they commit their lives to Jesus, start attending a Bible-believing church—they have arrived at first base. Inside, they know there is more...there is another place to go. But they aren't sure what the next step is, so they just stay at first base...sometimes for years. God doesn't want you stuck at first base. His desire is that you grow, and He will be relentless at working in you everything you need to flourish and grow!

*Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it.*

*2 Corinthians 13:5–6 MSG*

We are used to having regular health check-ups at the doctor's office. How much more should we give ourselves regular check-ups to make sure we are spiritually healthy? We should check to make sure that we are still moving forward, still growing. Acts 16:5 tells us that every day the believers were growing in their faith. They were not stuck on first base! And hey...

if at some point you find that you are not growing, that you are no longer moving in the right direction, do something about it!

It's with that in mind that I have outlined a few simple mile markers on your spiritual journey. It's a small list of your next steps so you can keep track of your progress and growth in the Kingdom! I have broken the steps down into three main categories that represent your growth in the Kingdom.

1. **Begin: this is where we get started on our spiritual journey.**
2. **Belong: this is where we get connected with others that will help us grow.**
3. **Become: this is where we get moving and grow as a minister (a servant) to others.**

## **Begin**

- Mile Marker #1—Put your faith in Jesus Christ.** Jesus gave His life for you, so determine to give your life to Him. God doesn't want a piece of your heart...He wants all of it! Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your



heart that God raised Him from the dead.  
Receive forgiveness of all your sins and  
God's gift of salvation!

- Romans 10:9–10
- 1 Peter 1:3

□ **Mile Marker #2—Regularly attend a Bible-believing church.** This is a key to your personal growth. You cannot grow in Christ and be cut off from His body at the same time.

- Hebrews 10:25
- Acts 2:42, 44

□ **Mile Marker #3—Set a regular time in the day when you will pray and read your Bible.** This is important time spent in the secret place and it is critical to developing your relationship with God.

- Psalm 5:3
- Matthew 6:6

- **Mile Marker #4—Get baptized in water.** Baptism is an outward expression of an inward reality. Baptism is a declaration that the old you is dead and the new you has risen!
  - Acts 2:38
  - Romans 6:3–4

## **Belong**

- **Mile Marker #5—Get connected in a small environment with other followers of Jesus.** This is where you belong. This could be a small group or Bible study class. Remember, nobody succeeds spiritually alone!
  - Acts 2:42
  - Ecclesiastes 4:9

- **Mile Marker #6—Become an official member of a local church.** This is all about the choice to become a participant, not just a spectator, in the body of Christ.
  - 1 Corinthians 12:18–20
  - Ephesians 4:16
  
- **Mile Marker #7—Be filled with the Holy Spirit.** The disciples of Jesus were told to wait until He sent the Holy Spirit to fill them with power from Heaven. God wants to fill you with power from Heaven, too!
  - Luke 24:49
  - Acts 2:38–39

## Become

- **Mile Marker #8—Use your gifts to serve others.** This is where you become a minister.
  - 1 Corinthians 12:7
  - 1 Peter 4:10
  
- **Mile Marker #9—Attend a course or seminar on leadership** to improve your ability to serve with excellence.
  - 2 Corinthians 13:5
  - Revelation 2:19
  
- **Mile Marker #10—Take someone along on the journey with you.** This is our call to make disciples and reproduce our lives in others.
  - Matthew 28:19
  - 2 Timothy 2:2
  - Hebrews 5:12

*There are no spare parts in the Body of Christ.*

The Bible teaches that we are each a necessary and important part of the Church (the body of Christ), and as each part does its job, it helps the other parts grow!

*He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is **healthy and growing and full of love.***

*Ephesians 4:16 NLT*

This is God's blueprint for you and my prayer for you—that you will be:

**Healthy:** that your relationships are healthy, your way of thinking is healthy, your way of speaking is healthy, your physical body is healthy, and that your spirit man is healthy!

**Growing:** I pray that each day you will find yourself growing in the faith. With every day may you look more and more like Jesus, being conformed into His image and likeness.

**Full of Love:** I ask the Lord to grant you a personal revelation of how much God loves you... and how much He wants to help you love others. May this revelation ruin you for the ordi-

nary. In view of God's immense love for you, may you throw your life into loving God and loving others. There is no better way to spend your life!

***Prayer:** Father in Heaven, thank You for saving me. I trust in You and You alone to forgive me of sin and grant me a home in Heaven. While I'm still here on earth, help me to grow every day in my spiritual journey. Help me so that I won't stay at the "begin" stage, but I'll move on to belonging in Your family—the Church. I pray that I will become all You have created me to be and do all You have created me to do. Teach me how to love others and reproduce my life in others. Produce in me, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, all that is pleasing to You—the character, integrity, and life that make You smile. Work in me all that I need to do Your will. Thank You! Amen!*

Again, congratulations on your decision to follow Jesus! May you experience great joy on your journey!











**“Count on it—that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.” Luke 15:10 MSG**

That’s right—all of Heaven throws a massive party every time one person comes to Christ. I celebrate with all of Heaven over you and say a heartfelt, “Congratulations!” on your decision to commit your life to Jesus Christ!

When you gave your life to Christ, you started a journey. It’s my desire that this book will be a simple, yet powerful tool to guide you on your spiritual adventure of getting to know your heavenly Father. It’s a journey that will change the rest of your life!

## **YOU’RE GOING TO DISCOVER**

- That you’ve been invited to friendship with God... seriously!
- The secret power of abiding prayer
- The treasure of God’s Word
- Why the church is a big deal to God and to you
- That there’s an anointing on your story

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Kevin Berry is Pastor of Mount Hope Church and International Outreach Ministries in Lansing, Michigan. The ministry campus is comprised of over 70 acres and includes an expansive worship center, children’s center, youth facilities, Hope Academy, Global Prayer Center, Valley of Blessing, Gilead Healing Center, and Hope Store and Café. Combined with many daughter churches regionally and worldwide, Kevin ministers to thousands weekly to make disciples that are healthy, growing, and full of love.

