



ABOUT



SALVATION



QUESTIONS

**30 DEVOTIONS FOR
KIDS, TEENS & FAMILIES**

CHAMP THORNTON
FOREWORD BY PAUL DAVID TRIPP

“Nothing is more important to parents than the salvation of our children. Yet it can be difficult to have meaningful conversations about it with our kids. In this clear and concise book, Champ Thornton provides families with an engaging resource to talk about the need for salvation and the Savior who meets that need.”

Nancy Guthrie, author, *The One Year Praying Through the Bible for Your Kids*

“It can be so difficult to know where to begin or what resources are available for family devotions. For that reason, I am so thankful for this excellent series for kids, teens, and families from Crossway! Champ Thornton’s volume, *10 Questions About Salvation*, is a wonderful starting place for any parents who want to have important spiritual conversations with their children. These warm and engaging devotions are the perfect length to help your family grow together as you talk about God’s gracious salvation for all who believe.”

Melissa Kruger, author; Vice President of Discipleship Programming, The Gospel Coalition

“*10 Questions About Salvation* provides upper elementary and older teens with a resource to help them understand the path to salvation in Christ. I love the prayers and reflections that follow each devotion, which call readers to consider their own lives and help them discern where they stand regarding the truth they just learned. Champ Thornton effectively explains difficult questions simply, with everyday illustrations kids will understand—a well-written youth discipleship and family resource.”

Marty Machowski, Executive Pastor, Covenant Fellowship Church, Glen Mills, Pennsylvania; author, *The Ology* and *The Redemption Tales*

"I cannot wait to put this volume in the hands of students! Champ Thornton communicates deep truths in a clear, accessible manner. He is pastoral in his approach, so any parent or pastor could place this in the hands of young students, knowing that they will be well cared for. He patiently explains terms and lingo, guarding from any assumptions about the reader. Everyone should stock their churches with copies of this book to hand out to anyone (young or old) seeking to know what true salvation is."

John Perritt, Director of Resources, Reformed Youth Ministries; author; father of five

"Champ Thornton has crafted a simple yet powerful resource that will benefit both parents and children of all ages. Through clear, Scripture-based answers and easy-to-grasp illustrations, this devotional beautifully unpacks the life-giving truths of salvation. Whether you are a parent seeking to present the gospel to your children or an individual of any age searching for answers, this book will be an invaluable guide on your spiritual journey."

Leslie Nunnery, Cofounder, Teach Them Diligently; author, *Teach Them Diligently* and *Heart School*

"Champ Thornton takes on the biggest, most important, and essential questions a family will ever have to face, and he's worked them into an approachable devotional guide. He equips parents to overcome all the intimidation of potentially daunting, critical topics of faith and salvation, and he's made it easy for us to have some beautiful family conversations about them. Every single Christian family needs this resource."

Adam Griffin, Lead Pastor, Eastside Community Church, Dallas, Texas; Host, *The Family Discipleship Podcast*; coauthor, *Family Discipleship*

“Champ Thornton has struck the right balance. Young families need both brevity and substance—and that can be hard to find. The question-and-answer format engaged our whole family, with kids ranging from ages seven to fourteen. These ten truths about salvation are too important to hope that they might simply be *caught* in a Christian home. Let’s make sure they are clearly *taught*. This book will help.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher, desiringGod.org; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through the Spiritual Disciplines*

“Sometimes, we feel like asking a ton of questions is dumb. But when it comes to God and salvation, asking questions is the smartest and best thing we can do! I love how Champ Thornton anticipates our questions and points us to Jesus and his word—the only source of perfect truth. Read on, and your faith in God’s Son will be strengthened!”

Kristen Wetherell, author, *Help for the Hungry Soul* and *What Makes You Beautiful*

“Clarity is always important, but there is no topic on which clarity is more critical than salvation. This book offers a clear, accessible explanation of the gospel and salvation in digestible bites. Filled with theological richness in easy-to-read, low-time-commitment installments, it functions as an achievable devotional tool for preteens and teenagers.”

Cameron Cole, Founding Chairman, Rooted Ministry

10
Questions
About
Salvation

10 Questions

Edited by Champ Thornton

10 Questions About Salvation, Champ Thornton

10 QUESTIONS ABOUT SALVATION

30 Devotions for Kids,
Teens, and Families

Champ Thornton

10 Questions About Salvation: 30 Devotions for Kids, Teens, and Families

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For Robben
Best friend, beloved wife, and
partner in the gospel of Christ

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Foreword

Every human desires to know and understand things because God hardwired that desire in us. When you were a toddler, you would ask your mom or dad endless *why* questions, and when they would give you an answer, you'd ask *why* to their answer. Because you seek to understand things, you are constantly asking questions—in your mind or out loud. And because you are asking questions all the time, you are always looking for answers.

Here's what's important to understand about people like you and me: We live our lives based not on what we have experienced but on how we have made sense of what we have experienced. You never leave anything in your life alone. You are constantly thinking about things, unpacking them in your mind, trying to understand them, and hoping things will make sense to you.

God knows you because he made you, so he understands your desire to make sense of your life. This is why he has given you his word, the Bible. In it, you find not only the best answers ever but also the best questions ever. You see, insightful people are not the people with the correct answers. Rather, they're the people with the proper questions—because you don't get the correct answers unless you ask proper questions. Within the brilliant questions the Bible asks and the brilliant answers it gives, you will find the greatest story ever told. It's the story of a perfect

world created by a loving God. It's the story of people made in God's image who turned their back on God, wanting their own way. It's the story of a world broken by sin and a God who sent his Son to fix everything sin had broken.

The Bible asks and answers the most critical questions: Why do we do bad things (sin), and where will we find forgiveness and the power for change (salvation)? This is what I love about *10 Questions About Salvation*. It looks to the Bible to ask and answer the most important questions you could ever ask in your life. Finding the correct answers in life is incredibly important—in fact, it is a matter of life and death. So open your heart and mind and read carefully, thoughtfully, and patiently. In this book are questions everybody should ask and answers everybody should seek and understand. And best of all, this book introduces you to the best thing to know. Actually, the best thing to know is not a “thing” at all but a person, and his name is Jesus. I hope this book helps you to know him. And in knowing him, come to trust him. And in trusting him, experience the wonderful life of rest, hope, and peace that only he can give. Jesus meets us in our weaknesses, failures, and sins with the best thing ever: grace. May this book help you to seek and celebrate his grace in new and fresh ways.

Paul David Tripp

OCTOBER 25, 2024

Series Preface

Jesus loved questions.

If you open your Bible and read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (the Gospels), you can count over three hundred places where Jesus asked questions and over one hundred times where he answered questions.

So if you bring questions to Jesus, you've come to the right place. The Lord invites all of us to pursue him with our questions, and he will answer. "For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:8).

You may have tons of questions, but the ten questions in this book will get you started. The *answers* to those ten questions are given in three daily devotional readings—three days for each question. These readings take you to the Bible, the word of God, where you can find answers to your questions. And these answers are all listed at the end of the book.

You can use this book however you like. You can skip straight to the list at the end. Or you can devour all thirty devotional readings at once, though it might take a few hours. You can read through all ten questions in order—one reading per day. Or your family could read one devotion together, perhaps at breakfast before the day or in the evening after dinner.

Find a way that works for you. But what's most important is that you listen to God's word. Whatever question is on your mind, let Jesus provide the answer through his word. If you're going to find, you must seek.

Ask him, and he will answer.

Champ Thornton

Introduction

Why was this book written? To help answer questions you may have about salvation.

But why are you *reading* this book?

Maybe you're curious about salvation and want to figure out a few things. (Or maybe the person who gave you this book wants you to learn a few things.) That's all good. It's a huge and amazing topic.

You may wonder:

- Is Jesus the only way to salvation?
- Why doesn't God just save everybody?

These are great questions. And in the pages ahead, we'll seek answers for your mind. We'll explore facts from God's word and discover truths about salvation.

But maybe you're more than curious. You're *concerned* about salvation. You've got personal questions. And they're not really for your mind; they're more for your heart.

You may wonder:

- How can I be sure that I'm a Christian?
- What does it mean to really believe?
- Can I ever lose my salvation?

If you've got questions like these, you're not alone. Many people—including lots of kids and teens—have struggled with doubts or fears about their salvation. And they've asked the same kinds of questions you have.

But they've also found answers. God has given his word to teach his people how to be wise about salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). In fact, the whole Bible is about salvation. It begins with the promise of a Savior to come (Gen. 3:15) and ends with praise for the Savior who came (Rev. 5). And in between is the epic story of salvation—how God is restoring everything sin had ruined.

So, as you read, bring all your questions—questions for your mind, questions for your heart, easy questions, tough questions. God has the answers you seek. He's put them in his word. And nothing is too hard for him.

Question 1

What Is Salvation?

DAY 1

Rescue Mission

If you go to church, you'll probably hear people talk a lot about "salvation." You'll hear about "being saved" or even "saving grace." (And that may make you wonder, "Who is Grace and why does she need saving?") You might hear your friends say, "I asked Jesus into my heart when I was six," or "I accepted Christ last year," or "I prayed to receive Christ." What's all that have to do with salvation? Let's start with what the Bible says:

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Tim. 1:15)

First, salvation is just another way to speak of being rescued. For example, if your pet hamster got loose in your home and you found him squeaking and stuck under a pile of laundry being circled by the cat, you'd come to his rescue. You'd reach in and put him back where he belonged. You rescued him, delivered him, saved him. Those are all different ways to refer to his "salvation."

Second, salvation is the mighty work of the King. In our verse above, "Christ Jesus" is the one who does the saving. Christ is not his first name. *Christ* is actually a title, like in *President* Lincoln or

Salvation

Through Christ,
God rescues rebels
from the penalty,
power, and
presence of sin.

Principal Skinner. In the Bible, *Christ* means “anointed one.” And Jesus is the anointed King (see Luke 23:2).

In the Bible kings rescued their people and defeated their enemies. For example, King Saul should have saved his people from the giant Goliath, but the next king (David)

did it instead (1 Sam. 17). But this might raise a question: Who are the enemies that *we* need to be saved from?

Third, the Bible teaches that each of us is a sinner (Rom. 3:23). Did you ever see parents teaching their two-year-old how to say *no*? Of course not. We’ve always wanted to be rulers of our own lives. We want to do what we want, go where we want, and say what we want. We’ve all basically told the real King (Jesus) to get off the throne. And this rebellion deserves God’s judgment (Rom. 6:23). So, as sinners, we need to be saved from ourselves.

But the verse on the previous page says that Jesus “came into the world to save sinners.” So, fourth, salvation comes from the loving heart of God. This same King didn’t stay in heaven; he came down to earth. Not to kill sinners but to be killed for sinners—to rescue rebels from the penalty of their crimes.

So what is salvation? Here’s one answer (there’s another one in the box above): *Salvation is when King Jesus lovingly rescues people who’ve rebelled against God.*

PRAYER

*Jesus, I'm so sorry that I've lived with myself
as a pretend ruler of my own life. Forgive me
and help me to trust you and live with you
as my true King. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*Have you ever felt like you needed rescuing
from something you did wrong? How do you
think Jesus feels about what you did?*

DAY 2

New Heart

If your hamster got loose because you left the cage door open, you can fix that. You just have to make sure the door always gets shut. But what if your furry little escape artist does nothing but eat, drink, and dream up new ways to wriggle his way to freedom?

Well, you don't have a cage problem. You've got a hamster problem.

And the same is true with people. Our biggest problem is not around us; it's inside us. We are born as rebels on the inside. Thankfully, King Jesus came to rescue us even from ourselves!

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. (2 Cor. 2:15)

First, the Bible teaches that our rescue is not something that King Jesus did only in the past; his salvation works in the present too. The verse above says that Christians "are being saved." Yes, he paid (in the past) the penalty for our rebellion (yesterday's reading). Yet he also delivers us from the power of sin (in the present). This started by God working in our hearts so that we don't *want* to rebel like we used to. The Bible calls this change of heart being "born again" (1 Pet. 1:3) or "regeneration" (Titus 3:5).

This is incredible news. Think about how powerless you are to change what you want. If you hate spinach, you can hold your nose and force yourself to gulp down some of that leafy green goodness. And perhaps I could help you by promising you an Xbox or a trip to Disney if you eat it. But not even Minecraft or Mickey can actually change your taste. You can make yourself *eat* spinach, but you can never make yourself *like* it. But God can.

God can change your desires. And he does. If you're a Christian, his rescue reaches into your heart so that you become a new person (2 Cor. 5:17).

Second, King Jesus expects you to obey him. We've seen that kings rescue, but kings also rule. They're in charge. So our verse, 2 Corinthians 2:15, says that "we are the aroma of Christ." That means that just like a marshmallow-scented candle will fill a room with thoughts of campfires and s'mores, our lives should make people think of King Jesus. We should act like Jesus and do what our King says. And everyday, King Jesus delights to rescue you—not just from sin's penalty when you fail but also from its power when you're tempted.

So what is salvation? *Salvation is when King Jesus lovingly rescues people who've rebelled against God and he changes their hearts to love and obey their King.*

Regeneration

The work of God the Holy Spirit that gives new life to spiritually dead sinners.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for not leaving me in my sin. Thank you for changing my heart. I want to obey you more; I want to obey you better. Please help me and rescue me from sinning, even today. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

How are you seeing Jesus rescue you from the power of sin in your daily life?

DAY 3

Future Freedom

Did you know that some people who've been in jail a long time don't want to leave? It's hard to believe, but even if they were free, some people would rather stay behind bars. Perhaps they're afraid of doing something new. Or maybe they just like having three meals a day and a place to sleep.

But think about all they're missing! When you're free, there's so much waiting for you to enjoy. The same is true for salvation—you are free and an incredible future awaits.

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.
(1 Thess. 5:9–10)

This passage teaches that people who reject Jesus as King are destined to face the penalty for their sin forever: God's wrath. Yet others, through King Jesus, have a different destiny. They will, our verse says, "obtain salvation." That's not just in the past; that's also in the future.

This means, first, that salvation is way more than Jesus forgiving you (past) and helping you fight sin (present). One day, Christians will never face sin of any kind ever again. In the future, King

Glorification

The future work of salvation where believers are given new bodies and freed from all the effects of sin forever.

Jesus will rescue us—not just from the penalty and power of sin—but even from the *presence* of sin. All of it—gone.

You'll never be tempted to sin or feel its effects. You'll never get hurt, sad, or sick again (Rev. 21:4). King Jesus has won a salvation that will fix your heart and the entire universe—all of it!

Second, this salvation is all about God. The passage on the previous page says that obtaining salvation means that we will “live with him.” This King hasn't brought us into his kingdom so that we can sit in jail and eat moldy bread crusts.

No, the King has rescued us and brought us to himself. *Himself!* And in his kingdom, he'll spread a feast for us. Think of the best party you've ever attended—good friends, great food, the best of times. But that celebration—like a movie trailer—is just a sample, a tiny taste, a short preview of the great forever feast the King has prepared. And best of all, we'll be with him, our King, whose heart leaps to be with you!

So what is salvation? *Salvation is when King Jesus lovingly rescues people who've rebelled against God and he changes their hearts to love and obey their King and to enjoy him forever.*

PRAYER

*Jesus, I cannot wait to see you and enjoy
being with you. Please help me to remember
and treasure the salvation destiny you've
prepared for me. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*If you could go to heaven but God wouldn't be there,
would you still want to go? Why or why not?¹*

Question 2

**Is Jesus the
Only Way to
Salvation?**

DAY 4

One Road

Sometimes people say, “You can believe what *you* want, and I’ll believe what *I* want. We just need to be good and treat people nice.” If you told them that you disagreed, they might get upset and say, “How dare you think that *only* Christianity leads to God! Don’t you know that *all* roads lead to God?”

But think about what they just said. *How do they know that?* If they say that “all roads lead to God,” where did they get this information? Answer: It’s what they believe. So they are simply sharing their faith, just like you are.

And there’s another problem: All these “roads to heaven” can’t all be true at the same time. Islam says that you have to faithfully obey Allah. Buddhism says that you achieve their version of heaven through meditation and good living. Hinduism requires the right kind of knowledge and life choices. And Judaism requires obedience to the law of Moses.

But Christianity is different. True salvation does not depend on how well you obey but on what Jesus has already accomplished. All these other roads are about “doing.” Christianity is about “done.” Jesus is the only road to God.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Incarnation

This refers to when Jesus took a human nature. Jesus is “God with us” (Matt. 1:23), fully God and fully human.

Why is this true? Why is salvation *only* through Jesus?

Because only Jesus is both God and man. He’s not half God and half man. Jesus is truly human: he had a real body (Acts 2:31), grew up (Luke 2:52), and got hungry and tired (Matt. 21:18; John 4:6). And Jesus is truly God: he receives worship (Matt. 14:33), forgives sins (Mark 2:5), and is eternal

(John 1:1). He is God *incarnate*, which means he is God come in the flesh (1 John 4:2).

But why is it important that Jesus is both God and man? Because only a true God-man could save humans from God’s judgment against sin (1 Pet. 3:18).

Because Jesus is human, he can take our place. He can die taking the punishment for sinful humans (Isa. 53:4–6; 1 Pet. 2:24). (And think about it, if he weren’t human, how could he have died at all?)

And because Jesus is God, he was able to live a sinless life (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22), something we sinners would never have been able to do.

If he weren’t God, he would have been a bad substitute. And if he weren’t human, he couldn’t have been a substitute at all.

Instead, we have the perfect substitute. *Because Jesus is both God and man, he is the only true way to salvation.*

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for coming to earth and being human for us. Thank you for providing the only way to be saved. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

What two truths from today's reading give you confidence in the salvation Jesus has won?

DAY 5

Mission Accomplished

You may say, “I believe that Jesus is truly God and truly man. I know that he lived and died as a substitute for sinners.”

But how do we know that what Jesus did actually achieved salvation? And does it really rescue people from sin?

First, you can be confident in his salvation because every detail happened according to plan. Jesus explained—in advance—exactly what he planned to do: “For even the Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

But, second, did Jesus’s plan actually work? Did his death really pay for sins? The Bible says, “Yes!”

Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. *Therefore* God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. (Phil. 2:8–9)

The key is thinking through the word “therefore.”

The death Jesus died was for the sins of other people (Rom. 5:6–8). The sins Jesus was carrying on the cross deserved death (Rom. 6:23). And that’s exactly what happened—Jesus died.

But Jesus didn’t stay dead. The Father raised him from the dead. Why? Because those sins were gone. The penalty for every

single one had been fully paid!

When he raised Jesus, the Father was telling the whole world that there was no more sin on Jesus at all. The resurrection declared that he was righteous, the sinless Son of God (Rom. 1:4; 4:25; 1 Tim. 3:16). So the resurrection was proof that he had accepted Jesus's payment for sin.

Justification

God's declaration
that you are
righteous because
you belong to
Jesus and he was
declared righteous.

(And here's where we get to that key word.) The death of the Son of God paid for every sin he carried; *therefore*, the Father raised him from the dead (see Phil. 2:9 on the previous page). Jesus's salvation plan had succeeded! And this means that you can be confident in Jesus's salvation. Acts 17:31 says that God "has given assurance to all *by raising him from the dead.*" So, if you're a Christian, all your sin has been placed on Jesus. And when he died, Jesus paid the full penalty for all your sin (Isa. 53:4–6). When God the Father saw that all those sins had been paid for, he ("therefore") raised sinless Jesus from the dead. And since he was declared righteous, if you belong to him, you are too.

Salvation through Jesus is the real deal; the only true way to God. Through his death and resurrection your sins were truly, completely, and eternally paid for. There's nothing left to pay. The resurrection proves it.

The resurrection shows that Jesus—as both God and man—is the only true way to salvation.

PRAYER

*Father, thank you for raising Jesus. He's alive, but
you've also shown me that his payment for sin worked.
Help me to live a new life too. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*How does Jesus's resurrection change the
way you think about your salvation?*

DAY 6

Truly Alive

But are we sure that the resurrection really happened? Some people think it's all pretend. Yet here are some facts showing that God truly raised Jesus from the dead.

The tomb was empty. If you read the New Testament, you'll see that no one said, "You *thought* Jesus was raised, but look: here's his body!" Instead, there was no body; the tomb was empty (Matt. 28:11–15). However, someone could've asked, "What if someone stole the body?" And that's exactly what some Roman soldiers claimed.

The guards were lying. The Roman soldiers who guarded Jesus's tomb said they had fallen asleep. And they claimed that's when Jesus's disciples snuck up and took the body (see Matt. 28:13). But that's not a convincing story. If the guards were sleeping—as they claimed—how could they have seen anybody steal the body? The soldiers' report is obviously a lie. But what about other witnesses? Is there reliable evidence that Jesus rose from the dead?

The eyewitnesses were authentic. In New Testament times, women were not allowed to give eyewitness testimony in a court case. Sadly, men thought that their words were unreliable. But in the Bible, who is it that gives firsthand testimony about Jesus being alive? Women! (See Matt. 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–11; John 20:1–2.)

Testimony

A firsthand retelling
of what a witness
saw or heard.

So just for a moment, pretend you wanted to spread a lie in New Testament times. Would you get *women* to tell everyone, “Yes, this really happened!”? In that time and culture, this wouldn’t help you spread a lie. So why would

the disciples claim that women were eyewitnesses of the resurrection in all four Gospels? Because that’s what truly happened. (And also because they and Jesus think that the testimony of women is wonderful and trustworthy!)

There’s other evidence too. Over five hundred people saw the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 15:6). And almost all the apostles were eventually killed for their faith. Would they really die for something they *knew* was a lie?

So is Jesus the only way of salvation? Yes.

Only someone who is fully God and fully human could provide salvation. Jesus is truly God and truly man. And how do we know that God accepted his payment for our sins? Because God raised him from the dead. And how do we know that Jesus was raised? The evidence from history and from the Bible is incredibly strong!

Since the God-man, Jesus Christ, was really raised from the dead, his resurrection shows that he is the only true way to salvation.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for not just asking us to believe without evidence. Thank you for giving us real life facts and truth to believe. You are real, and you are really alive. You are the one and only way to be saved. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

Which fact about Jesus's resurrection was most helpful to you? Why?

Question 3

**How Do
I Become a
Christian?**

DAY 7

The Gospel Train

If you traveled somewhere and someone asked you, “How’d you get here today?” what would you say? You might mention that day’s ride in a car, bus, or subway train. Or you could describe every detail: “Well, first, I got in the car, then I sat down, and when all the doors were shut, we started to move.”

In most conversations, you’d probably just focus on the vehicle and the drive, not on how you got inside the vehicle. Yet both are important, right?

The same is true for salvation: There’s a vehicle and a way to get in. Listen to the words of Jesus:

Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14–15)

So if someone asked, “How do I become a Christian?” you might answer by quoting what Jesus just said, “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). That’s 100 percent true—it’s how you get in. But Jesus also talked about *the vehicle* of salvation. He said, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” But what does that mean?

At the start of the Bible, God the King powerfully spoke the universe into existence. In his kingdom, he lovingly ruled over

Gospel

The “good news”—
an amazing
announcement—
of salvation through
Jesus Christ.

his world and his people; he provided for them and gave them a wonderful home and his very good laws (Gen. 1–2).

But you probably know that it wasn’t long before something terrible happened. The first people, Adam and Eve, decided to be their own rulers and live according to their

own laws (Gen. 3:1–7). So God sent them out of their special home. But he promised that he would set everything right (Gen. 3:15).

The rest of the Bible is the story of God starting to keep that promise. The entire Old Testament tells how God was creating a people who could experience his presence with them, obey his laws, and enjoy his blessings. But just like Adam and Eve, God’s people throughout the Old Testament disobeyed their King.

Then in the New Testament, God the Father sent his Son into the world, and Jesus *always* obeyed his Father. In Jesus, God was present with his people and blessed them. So what had happened to God’s people? As our main passage (Mark 1:14–15) says, the kingdom of God had come near them. And one day it would come in all its fullness and glory (Rev. 21–22).

This beautiful kingdom—where the whole universe will be set right—is the gospel “train,” the vehicle of salvation. And in Mark 1:15, Jesus announces its arrival and calls people to get on board. *Enter the kingdom of God (get on the gospel train) by repenting and believing the good news.*

PRAYER

Jesus, I praise you for bringing such an amazing salvation! You are doing so much more than we could imagine or deserve. Please keep teaching me about your salvation. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

Since salvation is more than only having your sin forgiven, how does that change the way you relate to Jesus?

DAY 8

Wrong Way

Have you ever been at a nice restaurant with your family, and instead of walking into the restroom, you walked into the kitchen by mistake?

It's awful to realize that you're going in the wrong direction. Especially when you thought it was the right direction. It can be embarrassing and frustrating. But it can also be dangerous—think about going the wrong direction on a one-way street. In all these situations, the right thing to do is to turn around and go in the right direction.

This is what Jesus tells us to do when we face the most dangerous situation of all. Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The word *repent* means to turn around or reverse the course you're taking (Acts 3:19). But what's the danger? Why do we need to turn around?

Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was at hand. The sad news is that ever since the first humans disobeyed God, all of us have been trying to build our own kingdoms. And all our tiny, fake kingdoms are going to be destroyed—because they're actually terrible places to live. So, in stunning love, Jesus calls us to change direction, to come out of our own little kingdoms and enter the goodness of his own wonderful kingdom.

That's repentance. But what does this look like in real life?

It means more than just saying you're sorry. Instead, God wants you to turn to him with all your heart. God said, "I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and

they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart" (Jer. 24:7; see also Joel 2:12).

Yet repentance is not about showing God that you feel really bad. It is being honest with God about your sin and asking him to forgive you. To repent is to turn away from living for your own kingdom (Acts 26:20).

So stop and think about your life. Are you living as the ruler of your own pretend kingdom? Jesus, the true King of the universe, is calling you to turn away from your little kingdom and turn to him and his very good kingdom. Will you take the crown off your own head? (If you already have, that's wonderful. And turning away from our own kingdom is something Christians are called to do each and every day.)

How do you become a Christian? *You enter the kingdom of God (get on the gospel train) by repenting (turning away from your kingdom) and believing the good news about Jesus Christ.*

Repentance

Turning away
from sin and your
own way.

PRAYER

*Jesus, I hate trying to live as the ruler of my life.
Would you forgive my sin and help me to live
with you as my King? I want this today and for
the rest of my life. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*Is repenting a regular part of your life
each day? Why or why not?*

DAY 9

Turning Around

Here's the question we're trying to figure out: "How do I become a Christian?" And we're listening to Jesus's words for the answer: "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Think about the last part of that verse. Repentance is turning away from your sin. Belief is turning to God for forgiveness of your sin. Repentance is turning away from living as your own ruler. Belief is turning to live with Jesus as your rescuing King.

Do you see the pattern? Repentance is turning away. Belief is turning to. Yet these aren't two separate things. If you were facing one wall in a room and then turned to face the opposite wall, that would be one movement, not two.

So when you repent—turning away from your sin—you're turning to Christ. And when you believe—turning to Christ—you're also turning away from your sin. They go together. In fact, you won't turn from your sin if you don't realize that turning to Christ is better than your sin. And you're not really turning to Christ if you're not also turning away from the awfulness of your sin. They're two sides of the same coin.

When the apostle Paul traveled to a town called Thessalonica, he told the people who lived there the good news about Jesus. These people worshiped various gods. But then Paul told

Belief

Turning to God by
relying on him and
trusting his word.

them about Jesus and the one true God.

Can you guess what happened? Some of those people realized that they were following false gods, idols that promised help but could never really deliver. So, many

of them left those fake gods to worship the real God, the only God who could actually save them. Here's how Paul remembered it:

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit. . . . You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (1 Thess. 1:6, 9)

Did you see what Paul says about how these people became Christians? They “turned to God [*belief*] from idols [*repentance*].” Other Bible passages say the same thing: You must repent and believe (Acts 19:4; 26:20).

So how do you become a Christian? Remember, *you enter the kingdom of God (get on the gospel train) by repenting (turning away from your kingdom) and believing the good news about Jesus Christ (turning to God).*

This is how you become a Christian, and this is how we continue to live as Christians. Always turning from our sin and turning to Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord, I have sinned. But I turn to you, the only true God, the only deliverer who can save me from my sin. Please forgive me and help me to trust you as my King and rescuer. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

Has your view of how someone becomes a Christian been different than what you read today? In what way? Who can you tell about what you learned?

Question 4

**What Does It
Mean to Really
Believe?**

DAY 10

Open Hands

Believing doesn't save you.

That may sound crazy or wrong, but it's true. In the same way, eating doesn't give you good nutrition. It all depends on what you eat. And jumping out of a burning building doesn't save your life. It all depends on what catches you.

The Bible doesn't teach merely that faith saves but that faith *in Jesus* saves. We don't put our trust in our own belief. Instead, we entrust our lives to Jesus, the only one who can rescue us from our sin.

Listen to what the Bible says that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection does:

- he frees and cleanses us from our sin (1 John 1:7, 9; Rev. 1:5);
- he rescues us from God's judgment against our sin (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9); and
- he declares us as righteous and forgiven before God (Acts 13:38–39; 2 Cor. 5:21).

This—and so much more—is what Jesus has already done. He came and defeated all our enemies: sin, death, and the devil (Rom. 8:2; 1 John 3:8). So there's nothing left for us to do—except to rely on what he has accomplished. We have “faith *in our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Acts 20:21).

Savior

The name *Jesus* means “the Lord saves.” He’s our rescuer and deliverer from sin and death.

And Jesus has promised to save everyone who comes to him, everyone who calls on him for rescue (Acts 2:21). So we believe him, and he will keep his word. He promises, “I’ll catch you.” So we jump, and he catches.

What is faith? What does it mean to believe? *To believe means that we personally de-*

pend on Jesus Christ, the rescuer whom God sent to save us from our sin (Luke 7:50; Acts 16:30–31; Rom. 10:10).

Belief in Jesus isn’t about how hard you believe or how much you believe. And trusting Jesus as your Savior isn’t about whether you understood everything perfectly when you first believed or if you really meant it. Instead, believing is receiving. It’s accepting Jesus and what he’s already done (John 1:12).

In other words, if salvation is like medicine, then faith is like your mouth. Your open mouth doesn’t make you healthy, the medicine does. Or if salvation is like a massive diamond, then faith is like your hand. Your open hand doesn’t make you rich, the diamond does.

So the question is this: Are you relying on Jesus the rescuer? Or are you looking inwardly at your own faith (how strong or weak it is)?

Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed. (Ps. 34:5)

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to earth to save us, to cleanse us from our sin. You are the rescuer; please help me to rely on you and not myself. I entrust my life—body and soul—to you. In Jesus’s name. Amen.

REFLECT

When you think about your salvation, do you focus more on your faith or on your Savior? Why?

DAY 11

True Facts

When it comes to salvation, it's not enough to believe (we talked about that yesterday). Here's another surprising statement: It's also not enough to say, "I believe in Jesus."

Imagine that you're talking with a friend about a show you like. When you bring up your favorite character, your friend doesn't seem to know exactly which person you mean. So you start describing the character: "He's the short guy . . . in seventh grade . . . with the crustache." And your friend begins to nod. But you can tell that he's not quite sure. So you pull up a pic online. And at that point your friend frowns and shakes his head. He had the facts wrong; he was thinking about someone else.¹

When someone says to you, "I believe in Jesus," you may both nod in agreement. But it's only when you open your Bible that you can see what's true about Jesus. Here's the point: It matters what truths you believe about Jesus.

Believing in Jesus means that you trust *him* (yesterday's reading). He's the *focus* of your faith. But believing in Jesus also means trusting specific things about him (Jude 3). This is the *content* of your faith. The Bible teaches us these truths about Jesus (Rom. 10:8–10; 1 Cor. 15:1–5). And it's our responsibility to believe these teachings (also called "doctrines"; see Rom. 1:17; 1 Tim. 4:6). "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves

of sin have become obedient from the heart to *the standard of teaching* to which you were committed” (Rom. 6:17).

Here are some truths from God’s word about Jesus the Savior. As Christians, we believe that

Doctrine

The truths and teachings of the Bible.

- Jesus, the Son of God, came from God the Father (John 16:27, 30; 17:8; 20:31);
- he became human (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 John 1:7);
- he died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:24); and
- he is Lord and was raised from the dead (Rom. 10:9–10; Phil. 2:11; 2 Tim. 2:8).

These truths about Jesus are facts. True facts. Facts you must believe. Why? Because they’re recorded in God’s word and they’re things that truly happened in history. They’re like events that you can read about on a news website. But the Bible calls these facts not just news but great news. That’s what the word *gospel* means: good news!

And what’s the news? Jesus has fully accomplished our rescue from sin. So there’s nothing more for us to do to be saved except receive Jesus and what he has done. And this is true and really—*really*—wonderful news!

So what does it mean to believe? *It means to believe the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ and personally depend on him—the rescuer whom God sent to save us from our sin.*

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, thank you for helping me understand and receive the good news about Jesus. Will you help me keep learning about Jesus and trusting him more and more? In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

Do you have questions about any of the truths about Jesus listed on the previous page? If so, pray about them and share them with a parent or another believer you trust.

DAY 12

Growing Faith

Today there's one more thing about believing in Jesus that may surprise you. Here it is: Although faith is not about your work, real *faith is working*. Yes, to become a Christian, true faith simply relies on Jesus. And after becoming a Christian, the same real faith keeps relying on Jesus. But real faith should also keep on growing. The Bible says,

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because *your faith is growing abundantly*. (2 Thess. 1:3)

When you first heard the gospel and trusted Jesus, it's like God planted a seed in your heart—the beginning of new life (James 1:21; 1 John 3:9). And as you continue to listen to God's word and trust Jesus, the seed doesn't stay small. It's supposed to grow and sprout and produce fruit (Matt. 13:18–23). This growth is called “sanctification”—it means that you're (sometimes slowly) becoming more like Jesus.

Look at how real faith acts. Real faith grows (2 Pet. 3:18). Real faith trusts Jesus (Acts 15:11; 1 John 3:23). Real faith obeys God (John 14:21; 1 John 2:3). Real faith repents of sin (Matt. 3:8; 1 John 5:18). Real faith loves God and other Christians (1 John 3:14; 4:12).

Sanctification

The process of
growing to be more
holy, to be more
like Jesus.

All this takes work and effort (Phil. 2:12–13; Heb. 4:11). And that sounds hard. So how can you do this? You’ve got to go back to where your Christian life started, back to the seed, back to the roots of faith.

For example, imagine that you’re at home. If you really believed that your house was on fire, what would you do? You and everyone with you would jump up and run outside! Why? Because you believed that your house was on fire. True faith takes action. Real faith grows.

So after you become a Christian, you must be doing two things at the same time. You must rely on Jesus, and you must take action to grow. God wants you to have both—believing and obeying—like two wings on an airplane.²

But what if you say that you trust Jesus yet you realize that there’s no growth or fruit in your life? If this is true, you should repent and rely on Jesus’s death for forgiveness. Then ask him to help you (2 Tim. 2:25; Heb. 3:15) and take action to grow (Phil. 2:12; 3:12–14).

So what does it mean to believe? *It means to believe the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ and personally depend on him to save us from our sin. And that same trust in Jesus should always result in effort to live for Jesus.* Real faith grows.

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, I can't obey without your help.
Please help me. I trust you to answer this
prayer and to give me strength, so help me
take action to obey. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*Would you say that your faith is more active
and obedient or lazy and disobedient?
What should you do about this?*

Question 5

**How Can I Be
Sure That I Am
a Christian?**

DAY 13

When in Doubt

Do you ever struggle with doubt? If so, you're not alone. The Bible is *not* a book about people who believed God with perfect faith. Abraham and Sarah doubted (Gen. 17:15–19; 18:10–15). Gideon doubted (Judg. 6:36–39). Even some of Jesus's own disciples—people who had seen the Savior—doubted (Matt. 28:16–17). Lots of people have doubted something about God or about their own salvation.

When Jesus sees you struggle with doubt, how do you think he responds? One time a man brought his son to Jesus. His son was being controlled and tormented by an evil spirit (Mark 9:17–22). The man asked Jesus for help, but the man didn't seem very confident: "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (Mark 9:22). Jesus pointed out the man's unbelief by repeating his words back to him: "If you can!" Then Jesus reminded him that God was more than able to heal his son: "All things are possible for one who believes" (Mark 9:23). The man immediately admitted his doubt (and his faith): "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

And how did Jesus respond? He healed the man's son (Mark 9:25–27). When you confess your mix of faith and doubt to Jesus, he sees your faith—even if it's small.

So how can you be sure that you're a Christian? Remember that *if you struggle with doubt, there's no need to panic.*

Doubt

Uncertainty about
whether something
is really true.

Many people have doubted, and you can find rest in your rescuer. When God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, he sent an angel of death to kill the oldest son in every family in Egypt—unless they had applied blood from a

spotless lamb on the door frame of their house (Ex. 12:21–24). If they did this, the oldest son would live. Imagine two families: Both of them had sons, and both applied the lamb's blood to their door frames. Both would be protected from judgment. But one son was wide awake all night, really scared; the other son slept soundly all night in calm assurance. Which son was more protected?

Answer: They were both equally safe.¹ The value of your faith isn't how strong it is but how strong the Savior is. And this is good news.

You may be doubting your salvation because you have questions, because you've been sinning against God, or maybe because you're not yet truly a Christian. But Jesus doesn't want you to stay stuck in your doubt (John 20:27–29; Heb. 6:11; 10:22). Because even doubters who take refuge in the blood of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, will be rescued.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for providing the perfect rescuer.

I believe that Jesus is the only Savior from sin.

I believe; help my unbelief. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

If you've struggled with doubt, how do you normally handle your doubts? How should you respond to your doubts differently in the future?

DAY 14

Don't Stop Believing

Do you remember exactly when you became a Christian? Sometimes, not knowing can cause us to wonder whether we're really saved.

Maybe you have friends who can tell you exactly when they were born into God's family. They can probably tell you where they were, what happened, and what they said to the Lord. "Good for them," you may think. "But what about me? How will I ever know for sure?"

Some people try the solution of just starting over. It works for laptops and phones, right? If there's a glitch, you just power it down and turn it back on.

But the Bible has a more helpful approach. The Bible paints two pictures about becoming a Christian. The start of the Christian life is (1) like being born and (2) like beginning to run a race.

First, Jesus said that to enter God's kingdom, each person needs to be "born again" (John 3:3, 7). You were dead in your sins (Eph. 2:1) but have now been made alive spiritually (Col. 2:13). Like we talked about on day 2, Christians refer to this as the "new birth"; the Bible also calls it "regeneration" (Titus 3:5).

So think about this: Do you remember when you were born as a baby? Of course not! But you don't need to look at your birth certificate to know that you were born. Why? Because right now you're

breathing and have a pulse. In the same way, you don't need to go back and try to figure out the details about your spiritual birth. Instead, you should ask: "Am I spiritually alive right now? Am I trusting Jesus, and am I repenting when I sin?"

But what if you're still not sure? The second Bible illustration is a race:

Conversion

The moment when you became a Christian, when you—through faith and repentance—were converted.

Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and *let us run* with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus. (Heb. 12:1–2)

If you're running a 5K and you've stopped to sit down on a bench, what should you do next? If you're going to finish, you don't go back to the starting line. You just start running again.²

Don't panic if you start to doubt (yesterday's reading) ***and don't try to start over or revisit all the details about when you became a Christian.***

It may be helpful to remember one more thing. A person's at-the-beginning response to the gospel ("repent and believe," Mark 1:15) is also the Christian's every-single-day response. We should *always* be repenting from sin and relying on Jesus. So it doesn't matter whether you do that today for the first time or the gazillionth time. Or maybe you've lost count. What matters is that you keep looking toward Jesus in repentance and faith.

PRAYER

Lord, I look to you today. Help me not to become too concerned about how I started but to focus on repenting and relying on you today. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

Why is it sometimes unhelpful to try to figure out exactly when you became a Christian?

DAY 15

Firm Foundation

If you find yourself always wondering whether you're really a Christian, it will be kind of like trying to stand on stilts. Not very steady. In contrast, God wants you to have a strong and stable foundation (Col. 2:2).

Once there was a church where some people had wobbly faith in Jesus. This was a problem, but then the apostle Paul pointed to the solution. He said,

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." (2 Tim. 2:19)

Imagine your salvation having a wide and strong "foundation," like the base of a pyramid or building. What helps give a wobbly Christian such a firm foundation? If you look closely at the foundation that Paul describes, you'll see the answer.

On the foundation stone is carved a "seal." (Sometimes on old buildings you'll see words engraved that tell facts about who made the building: "This building was built by the owner, Bob Smith, in the year 1901.") The Christian's firm foundation has an engraving too. And it has two parts.

Adoption

God's work to
make you a
member of his
family.

First, “the Lord knows those who are his.” What makes you stable is that you belong to God. When you turned to Jesus for salvation, you didn’t just make a deal with God (“I’ll trust you, and you’ll forgive me”). Instead, God the Father adopted you into his family.

And he’s not going to lose track of you. He knows you—you! He would never forget a child he loves so much! Now that’s a solid and unmovable foundation.

The second part of the foundation’s engraving is this: “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” *Iniquity* is just another word for *sin*. If you’re part of God’s family, it changes you and the way you live. So if you claim to be a Christian (one “who names the name of the Lord”), then you can’t keep living in sin. If you tolerate sin in your life and don’t repent, then you may or may not be a Christian, but you’re definitely not going to *feel* like one.

So if you are doubting, ask yourself this: Is there sin that I am not turning from? If so, then let this verse lead you to repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness. And let it encourage you that “the Lord knows those who are his.”

But what if you *still* find yourself wondering and doubting? *Don’t panic and don’t try to go back and start over* (yesterday’s reading). *If you’ve already begun the race, keep running away from sin and toward the loving Father who brought you into his family.*

PRAYER

*Father, thank you for adopting me into your family,
for making me your own. Help me to live like a
member of your family. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*When God thinks about you, what do
you think runs through his mind?*

Question 6

**How Should
Being a
Christian Affect
My Daily Life?**

DAY 16

Be Who You Are

Have you ever been in a play or musical? It's hard work. There's lots to remember and rehearse. You've got to become a specific character. You've got to keep track of your lines and cues—when to come on stage, where to move, how to exit. But the whole production only lasts an hour or two. With practice, you should be able to keep all those details in your mind, stay on script, and perform great!

But what if you had to remember exactly what to say, feel, and do *all the time*? That'd be impossibly hard. But does it sometimes seem like that's what it's like to live as a Christian? Like you have to keep the whole Bible with its truths and rules in mind all the time? Wow—that's a lot!

Yet living as a Christian is not like having a role in a 24/7 play. Instead, it's more like joining a family. Of course, families have rules, but being part of a family is so much more than rule keeping!

Here's why. As a Christian you are *united* to Jesus Christ. When he died on the cross, you died too. When he was raised to new life, you were also raised (Rom. 6:5; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:12–13). Christ identifies with us, and we with him! God is your Father, and you're part of his family.

So being a Christian in everyday life isn't like playing a part in a play—as if you're trying to fill a role that's *not* the real you. Instead, it's like living out the *real you* who's united to Christ.

Union with Christ

Being connected to Christ by faith so that Christ identifies with us and we with him.

Jesus thought this way. According to Jesus, here's who you are (*identity*): "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). So live that way (*activity*): "Let your light shine before others" (Matt. 5:16).

The apostle Paul thought this way too. Live out your true identity:

Identity: Who you are "in Christ"	Activity: How you should live "in Christ"	Bible passage
"You have been raised with Christ"	"Seek the things that are above, where Christ is"	Colossians 3:1
"As the Lord has forgiven you"	"So you also must forgive"	Colossians 3:13
"As Christ has welcomed you"	"Welcome one another"	Romans 15:7

How, then, should being a Christian affect your daily life? *Live out your identity as part of God's family (union with Christ).*

In other words, you should discover what the Bible says that Jesus has done for you and to you. Then live out that new identity. Of course, the Bible has good rules to obey for our good. Yet those are instructions for what it looks like to live in the family of God. To sum things up: Be who you are "in Christ."

PRAYER

Father, thank you for uniting me to your Son. Thank you for bringing me into your family. Help me learn to live out my new identity. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

What are other ways that preparing for a role in a play is different than living out your identity in Christ?

DAY 17

Enjoy the Lord

Recently, a huge snowstorm hit the town where I live. Someone posted a meme online that said, “Ever since the storm started, my husband has been looking through the window. It looks cold out there; I should probably let him in.”

It’s not enough to just be part of a family. One of the great blessings of family is *enjoying* your family. This is what Jesus wants from every Christian. He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, *I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me*” (Rev. 3:20; see also John 14:23). This meal with Jesus paints such a wonderful picture of love!

If yesterday’s reading was all about your position in God’s family (“*union* with Christ”), then today’s reading is all about your relationship with God in his family (“*communion* with Christ”).

But how do you *enjoy* a relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit? The good news is that God has already done all you need to enjoy him. Read this verse and notice the words connected to the Father, Son, and Spirit:

The *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ and the *love* of God and the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)

- God already *loves* you. He delights in you and sings over you with joy (Hos. 11:8–9; Zeph. 3:17; John 3:16; 1 John 3:1).
- Jesus’s heart toward you is already full of *grace* and mercy (Matt. 11:29; John 1:14, 17).
- You enjoy *fellowship* with God when the Holy Spirit applies to your heart Jesus’s grace and the Father’s love (John 15:26; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 2:12–13).

Communion with God

Enjoyment of the relationship you have with God, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

So how should being a Christian affect your daily life? How can you enjoy your relationship with him?

Start by taking time to *thank* the Father, Son, and Spirit for saving you and bringing you into the family (Col. 1:12–14).

Then ask the Lord to help you *know* him (Father, Son, and Spirit) more deeply and fully (Eph. 3:18–19). To know what he likes and doesn’t like (Phil. 1:9–10; Col. 1:9). To know God like you would get to know a friend (Luke 7:34; John 15:15).

And make time to *listen* to what the Lord says (in his word) and to *talk* to him (in prayer). This is good, open communication. Isn’t this what families do?

How should being a Christian affect my daily life? *Live out your identity as part of God’s family (union with Christ) and then seek to enjoy the relationships of that family (communion with Christ)* (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3).

PRAYER

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—thank you for bringing me out of the cold of sin and into the warmth of your family. I ask that you would help me get to know you better. I love you, Lord. In Jesus’s name. Amen.

REFLECT

If someone asked, how would you describe your relationship with God (Father, Son, and Spirit)?

DAY 18

Enjoy the Family

Family can be wonderful. And sometimes, if you're honest, family can drive you crazy, right?

Salvation brings you into God's family. So, like it or not, there are other family members too! Just like in your own family, as you get to know other brothers and sisters in Christ, you'll find that it can be wonderful. (And sometimes a little crazy!)

But Jesus said,

The second [most important commandment in the Bible] is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:31)

"Love your neighbor" means we should be glad to help and encourage *all* the people in our lives. Yet we ought to have a special love for other Christians, for people in the family of God (Gal. 6:10).

So stop and think about that closest kind of family relationship. Is it child and parent? Husband and wife? Brother and sister? Grandparent and grandchild? Back when the New Testament was written, the closest family relationship was not husband and wife—two unrelated people who become a family.

Instead, it might surprise you that the closest of all family relationships was among brothers and sisters. These are people who,

Fellowship

The family relationship or partnership that Christians have with God and with one another.

most of the time, are related by blood. You are born with a natural, unbreakable connection to these other humans, even if they annoy you and leave the bathroom a mess.

So when the apostle Paul wrote to a church in New Testament times and said that Christians were brothers and sisters (1 Tim. 5:1–2)—people

must have been really surprised: “You mean I should treat other Christians like the closest kind of relationship?”

What made it even wilder was that these people were not related, not even close. Some were rich; some were poor. Some were free, and sadly, some were slaves. Some were educated; some were not. But now, united to Christ, all these people shared close fellowship with each other. They’re family. And they should be treated that way—with love and wisdom and purity and care.¹

Why? Because, as a Christian, you are now closely related to people who may not be like you at all. So how does being a Christian affect the way you ought to live? *Live out your identity as part of God’s family (union with Christ) and then seek to enjoy the relationships of that family—by loving God and the brothers and sisters around you (communion with Christ and his family)* (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3).

This might be challenging and sometimes a bit crazy, but the Lord will help you. So let’s ask him to do that.

PRAYER

*Father, help me to love my brothers and sisters
in your family. Help me to be thoughtful
and kind, giving and forgiving. This is how
you've treated me. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*Are there specific people that God has already brought
to mind that he wants you to love and serve in some
way? How can you prepare to do that this week?*

Question 7

**Since I'm a
Christian, Won't
My Struggles
Go Away?**

DAY 19

The Saints

When you hear the word *saint*, what comes to your mind? Maybe your thoughts go straight to holidays—like Saint Patrick's Day or Christmas and good ol' Saint Nick?

But would it surprise you to know that the Bible says that when you become a Christian, *you* are instantly made into a “saint” (Rom. 1:7; Eph. 1:1)? The word means a “holy person.” When you became a Christian, God has set you apart to be in his holy family (Eph. 2:19), and he’s called you to live a holy life (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2).

But that doesn’t mean you have a halo. A saint is not a super Christian. As a Christian you may be in God’s holy family, but you’re not in heaven yet! So for the rest of your life on earth, your struggle with sin will not go away. Being tempted to sin—and fighting that temptation—is normal Christian living.

Look at what the Bible says about every saint’s lifelong struggle with sin.

<i>Saints have room to grow.</i> And the Lord changes us as we see how glorious he is.	“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, <i>are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another</i> ” (2 Cor. 3:18; see also 2 Pet. 3:18).
<i>Saints go to war against sin.</i> Fighting sin is hard and can feel like part of you is dying.	“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you” (Col. 3:5; see also Rom. 8:13).
<i>Saints seek forgiveness.</i> Sadly, we won’t always succeed in our fight with sin. So we’ll need to ask the Lord to forgive us regularly.	“Give us each day our <i>daily</i> bread, <i>and forgive us our sins</i> ” (Luke 11:3–4; see also 1 John 2:1–3).

It’d be nice to say that once you become a Christian, you don’t have to worry about sin anymore. It’s true that you don’t have to worry about being eternally punished for your sin. Jesus took that punishment in your place.

But saints still wake up to find themselves sinners too.

So Christians don’t fight sin because we want to *become* saints. Christians fight sin because we already *are* saints.

Our struggles won’t go away. Christians are both saints and sinners. But Jesus will help and strengthen you in your fight against sin (1 Cor. 10:13). Turn to him for help: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Saint

A holy one, one
who belongs
to God.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for facing temptation and never giving in. You know the struggle we face every day. Help us to fight sin and temptation. Help us to rely on your grace. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

On an average day, which do you feel most like—a saint or a sinner? Why?

DAY 20

The Suffering

What would you do if you bought some shoes online, and when they arrived, you discovered that the soles were coming off? You'd probably send them back and order another pair. Hopefully, they'd get the next ones right. Surely, not every pair would be messed up.

But what about when *life* is messed up? Sure, you can ditch some friends (*they really have serious issues*) and make new ones. But then what? The new friends have problems too. And you can also try to improve other things in life. You can change schools, churches, cities, states, and countries. And what will you find?

Yes, some places and people can be better than others. But every single one is broken. The Bible is honest about this:

Beloved, *do not be surprised* at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you (1 Pet. 4:12; 1 Thess. 3:2–4).

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, pain and suffering invaded the whole world (Rom. 5:12). So you can't just order brand new situations. All of them are messed up. And being a Christian doesn't give you a "get-out-of-suffering card."

But the Lord doesn't leave you to suffer alone. First, never forget that Jesus chose to enter our world of suffering. He felt

physical pain (1 Pet. 2:20–25), emotional pain (Luke 22:41–44), and relational pain (Isa. 53:3–4). So no matter how awful you feel, Jesus knows exactly what you’re going through (Heb. 4:15–16).

Second, remember that no matter what pain you’re feeling, Jesus is also right there beside you (Ps. 23:6; Matt. 28:20). Suffering doesn’t automatically mean that God has turned against you (Rom. 8:32). In fact, he has sent his Spirit to help you. And what does the Holy Spirit do for you when you’re suffering?

- The Spirit gives you relief—a taste of the perfect world to come (Rom. 8:23).
- The Spirit sustains you when you have no more strength (Rom. 8:26).
- The Spirit prays for you when you don’t even know what to say (Rom. 8:26).

Third, God is going to use your suffering! He’s using hard times to make you more like Jesus (James 1:2–4). And he’s preparing you to encourage other people who are suffering too (2 Cor. 1:3–7). God can use your suffering in amazing ways.

Our struggles won’t go away; Jesus helps us. Christians are saints and sinners, and we’re sufferers too.

Trials

The hardships and sufferings that we all experience because we live in a sinful and broken world.

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, thank you for walking with me through
even my worst days. Please give me relief. But
until that happens, please give me strength
and help me. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*Which of the truths about God and your
suffering is hardest for you to believe? Why?*

DAY 21

The Swirl

What's better after a hot summer day than a couple different scoops of cold, delicious ice cream? But if you don't eat fast, it might melt. And then those two great flavors become one, messy, not-so-great flavor.

If you like things nice and neat, the messiness of melting ice cream may annoy you. But the messiness of real life may frustrate you even more. This is true, even for Christians. In the heat of everyday struggles, life often melts into a muddled mix. You aren't a sinner on one day and then a sufferer on the next.¹ Everything is swirled together.

Think about the last time you got angry. If you said something mean, that's a sin. But maybe it was because someone was mean to you. That's suffering. And this whole time, as a Christian, you're also a saint.

God's people have always lived messy lives. Listen to what King David prayed:

Turn to me and be gracious to me,

.....

Consider my affliction and my trouble,

and forgive all my sins. (Ps. 25:16, 18)

Intercession

The prayers of one person for another.

Who is David praying to? “My God” (Ps. 25:2). That means he belongs to God. David is a *saint*.

What is he experiencing? “Affliction,” “trouble,” and emotional “distress”

(Ps. 25:17–18) from his enemies who hate him (25:19). David is definitely a *sufferer*.

But David also confesses his own failures to God (Ps. 25:18). And he says, “Pardon my guilt, for it is great” (Ps. 25:11). David is a *sinner* too.

So even for Christians, life will continue to be a swirl, with many strands tangled together. And often it’ll be hard to know what to pray. Should I ask for help in my suffering, or should I ask for forgiveness of my sin?

Thankfully, the Lord doesn’t make us untangle all the knots. But he has given us the Holy Spirit, who will help us pray (Rom. 8:26). When we don’t know what to pray or how to handle the tangle, sometimes all we can do is groan (Rom. 8:23). The Spirit hears our groaning and makes intercession for us—that means he prays for us (Rom. 8:26–27). And the Spirit knows exactly how and what to pray.

The life of a Christian will be a struggle. It’s hard, but normal. *Christians are saints and sinners and sufferers—all swirled together. And through all that swirl, Jesus will always help us.*

During his earthly ministry, Jesus helped suffering people who needed forgiveness, and he forgave sinners who needed healing. So you can take your tangled up messes to the same gracious Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for knowing all about my suffering and my sin. Hear my groaning, forgive me, and help me. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

What part of King David's prayer (from Psalm 25) was most meaningful to you? Why?

Question 8

**If God Is Loving
and Powerful,
Why Doesn't
He Just Save
Everybody?**

DAY 22

Giving Time

If I asked you, “How does Google work?” what would you answer? You might explain that you open the webpage or app, and then you type what you want to search for. Simple.

But what if I said, “That’s a great answer, but I want to know *all the details*: Explain to me how all the lines of code make it work.” What would you say then? That’s a lot more complex, isn’t it?

Whenever you ask a “how does it work” question, there are usually two ways to answer. There’s the (simple) answer of a user and the (complex) answer of a creator. The same is true about almost any teaching in the Bible.

Think about this example: On a simple level, if someone asks, “How does a person become a Christian?” we can answer, “Repent of your sin and trust Jesus Christ.”

On a deeper level, if someone asks, “How does a person become a Christian?” we can answer, “God uses his mighty power to turn people’s hearts to trust him.”

(And if you wonder, “Do I really believe that?” then just ask yourself, “Do I ever pray for God to save people?” If you do, then you must believe that God has the power to turn people’s hearts to trust him as Savior. If he doesn’t, then why would you ask him to do that?)

Patience

The ability to kindly
endure something
over time.

Both levels are true. And the same is true for today's question: "If God is loving and powerful, why doesn't he just save everybody?"

On a deeper level, could God turn everyone to himself? The answer is yes. But trying

to explain that is even more complex than talking about how Google works. So we're going to focus on the simpler level.

Why doesn't God just save everybody? In other words, why would God allow someone to go to hell?

First, remember that God hates to see people hurt themselves and each other—and that's what sin does. (Imagine if your mom, dad, or someone else you love were killed by a drunk driver. How would you feel about drinking and driving? You'd hate it!) So when God judges sin, he is expressing his holy anger against something truly awful, something that destroys people (Rom. 1:18).

Second, remember that *God is not only holy but also patient* (2 Pet. 3:15). He doesn't judge quickly (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:15). And this kindness and patience have a goal: to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Sadly, sometimes, people—even though they have been given lots of time to repent—still refuse to turn from their sin and turn to Jesus (Rev. 2:21).

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I want to pray for some people I know who aren't Christians. Would you change their hearts so that they would repent and turn to you as Savior and Lord? Thank you for your patience with them and with me. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

Who are two people you know, who are not Christians, that you can pray for? Take time to pray today that God will save them.

DAY 23

Giving Desires

When I was a kid, I loved stories or movies where someone got three wishes. If that had ever happened to me, I knew exactly what I would wish: “I want an unlimited number of wishes!”

But how does the story usually go? When people get their wishes, it often doesn’t turn out the way they had hoped. Ariel gets into a lot of trouble. And Aladdin makes a mess of things.

Giving people what they want creates tragedies in movies. And the same is true in real life.

In the book of Exodus, the evil king of Egypt, Pharaoh, would not let God’s people leave. Instead, he wanted to keep them as his slaves. So God’s sovereign plan was to let him have what he wanted. (Cue menacing music.)

Pharaoh refused to let Israel go free. His heart was stubborn (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22). So God made life miserable for Pharaoh and the Egyptians by working miracles or “plagues” that displayed God’s mighty power (Ex. 7:3, 5). When Pharaoh then said that he would obey, God took away the plague he had just sent. But once Pharaoh saw that the plague was gone, “he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said” (Ex. 8:15).

This cycle happened again and again. For plague after plague, Pharaoh stubbornly hardened his heart (Ex. 8:32). Pharaoh did exactly what he wanted. Until . . . the story changed. “But *the*

Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses” (Ex. 9:12).

Who hardened Pharaoh’s heart? God. And—exactly as God had sovereignly planned and promised (Ex. 4:21; 7:3)—this kept on happening (Ex. 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8).

What had Pharaoh wanted? To harden his heart against the Lord. And how did that turn out? Pharaoh got exactly what he wanted. So how does this relate to our question? If God is loving and powerful, why doesn’t he just save everybody?

When people refuse to become Christians, God is giving them what they want (Rom. 1:24–28). Psalm 81:12 repeats this scary truth:

So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,
to follow their own counsels.

Yesterday we saw that God is gracious—he gives people time. Today we see that God is fair—he gives people what they want. The sad truth is that men and women do not turn to God for mercy because it’s not what they want (John 3:19). And God lets them have what they desire.

Just

What is fair, good,
and right.

PRAYER

Father, I ask that you would not let me have what I want but what you want. I pray that you would control my heart so that I would want to trust and obey you more and more. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

As you think about today's reading, what does it say about the popular advice, "Follow your heart"?

DAY 24

Giving Mercy

Here's the question we've been looking at for the last few days: "If God is loving and powerful, why doesn't he just save everybody?"

Today, let's divide this question into two parts—the first part is about the Lord ("God"), and the second part is about people ("everybody").

When many people think about these two things together—about God and about what happens to people when they die—they often express surprise. They ask, "How could *God* ever let *people* be judged in hell?"

And the truth is that there *really* is something surprising about the two parts of the question—God and people. What's so surprising? Well, it may surprise you.

What's surprising is *not* that God would ever send sinners to hell. What is mind-blowing is that God would ever let sinners into heaven!

From birth, we are all sinners by our very nature (Rom. 5:12). Throughout life, everybody chooses to sin (1 John 1:8). Until we die, we all know what it's like to want to do our own thing and go our own way, to be our own little rulers (Isa. 53:6).

So how should God respond to this? Isn't it only right and just and fair for God to punish sin? Can you imagine if someone murdered a loved one in your family—and after the murderer

Grace

God's undeserved
goodness toward
guilty people.

was taken to court, the judge decided to simply let the person go free? How would you feel? You'd be furious. Why? Because what the judge did was not right or just or fair.

But God is right and just and fair. So wouldn't it be right and just and fair for him to punish every single sinner? After all, God is a just Judge (Gen. 18:25; 2 Tim. 4:8). But if God gave everyone only justice, then no one would be saved.

Thankfully, he is also a gracious Savior (Titus 1:3). In love, God has decided to also pour out mercy and forgiveness (1 Tim. 1:12–17). All those who repent and trust Jesus will enjoy his salvation.

So at first, it makes sense to ask “Why would God judge people?” That's a legit question. But the deeper question is “Why would God save *anyone at all?*”

When it comes to sinners, *God gives them time* (the reading two days ago), *and God gives them what they want* (yesterday's reading). *And for those who will turn to him, God also gives amazing mercy* (today).

Did God *have* to save you? No. He forgave you because he is merciful not because you deserve it. It's all due to his generous grace.

So ask yourself, “Why would God save *me?*” This is the real question. This is the question that should fill our hearts with wonder and surprise!

PRAYER

*Father, thank you for your amazing mercy,
incredible patience, and generous forgiveness.
I don't deserve your salvation. So I praise you for
loving and saving me. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*What part of today's reading was
most surprising to you? Why?*

Question 9

**How Can I Be
Sure That
Christianity
Is True?**

DAY 25

Jesus's Claims

When someone asks whether Christianity is true, there are so many things we could talk about. There's evidence from history, science, or archaeology. But the best place to start is Jesus.

Why? Because if Jesus is who he claimed to be, then what he said about the Bible and salvation is also true. So who is Jesus? Let's ask him. But prepare yourself: He made some pretty intense statements.

Jesus told people that he could forgive sins (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 7:48–49). Jesus claimed he could give people true life (John 5:21–29; 6:35). Jesus said that he was establishing God's kingdom (Matt. 12:28). Jesus even claimed to have the authority of God (Matt. 28:18; John 17:2). Do you know anyone else who claims things like this?

So what should we believe about Jesus? According to C. S. Lewis (author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* books), you've basically got three options.¹

OPTION 1: JESUS IS LYING

Think about the strong statements that Jesus made about himself (listed above). Anyone could say that he had all authority. Anyone could just *tell* people that he could give them true life

Lord

An authority
who is in
control—a master,
ruler, or king.

or forgiveness. Anyone could *claim* that he was establishing God's kingdom. But he'd be lying.

Jesus did more than merely talk. He proved it with actions! He calmed storms—something only God can do (Mark 4:35–41). He healed people no

one else could help (Mark 5:1–20). And he raised people from the dead (Mark 5:21–43). So option 1 isn't really an option.

OPTION 2: JESUS IS INSANE

Some people might say that Jesus wasn't lying but that he went around making wild statements. The world is full of lunatics and crazy people. What if Jesus meant well but was actually out of his mind?

But Jesus did more than make incredible statements about who he was. He also gave lots of brilliant teaching (Matt. 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 23–25). People were amazed by what he taught (Matt. 7:28–29; Mark 6:1–6). When the Bible experts of his day tried to trick Jesus, he stumped them with wise and logical answers (Matt. 22:15–46). Even more, Jesus probably knew most of the Old Testament by heart (Matt. 4:1–17; Luke 2:46–47). No, Jesus wasn't insane. He was a genius. So option 2 isn't an option either. And that leaves us with . . .

OPTION 3: JESUS IS GOD

Who is Jesus? He's not a liar. He's not a lunatic. And he's also not a legend dreamed up by the disciples.² He is exactly who the Bible

truthfully says he is: the Lord of all. And this is the first step in knowing that Christianity is really true. *Because every claim this powerful, miracle-working genius makes is true and reliable.*

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, I ask for you to help me trust
you more and believe that everything you
say is true. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*Which truth about Jesus makes you most
confident that Christianity is true?*

DAY 26

Jesus's Bible

Some people might say, “That’s all fine about Jesus. He’s amazing. But what about Christianity and the Bible. How can we know that this ancient book is actually true?”

This is an important question because we learn about our salvation from the Bible. And if the Bible isn’t true, then what does that say about your salvation?

But if Jesus is full of perfection and power and brilliance (yesterday’s reading), then we can trust every word he said. So what did Jesus say about the Bible and what does that mean for you?

First, you can trust the entire Old Testament. Why? *Because Jesus said so.*

Jesus said that the Old Testament recorded real historical events—like creation (Mark 10:6-9), the flood (Matt. 24:37-39), the story of Jonah (Matt. 12:39-40), and more. Jesus also believed that the Old Testament Scriptures are the very words of God (John 10:35).

But what if Jesus only meant *part* of the Old Testament?

In Luke 11:51, Jesus talked about two famous murders in the Old Testament: the murder of Abel and the murder of Zechariah. Why these two? In the Old Testament, Abel is the first murder victim, recorded in Genesis 4:8, and Zechariah is the last murder victim, recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. In Jesus’s day,

2 Chronicles was the last book of the Old Testament—their books had a different order than our Bibles today. So Jesus was saying that the Old Testament starts in Genesis (Abel) and runs all the way to the end (Zechariah). When it comes to the Old Testament, from A to Z—it's all God's word.

Scripture

The Bible, including the Old and New Testaments; the writings that are the very words of God.

Second, you can also trust the New Testament. Why? *Again, because Jesus said so.*

On the night before he died, Jesus told his disciples about things that would happen after he left them. He would send his Spirit to be in them. The Spirit would help the disciples remember everything Jesus had said and done (John 14:26). Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit would guide them in the truth (John 16:13).

So how did that turn out? The New Testament is the result. The Spirit helped the disciples remember and write the truth about Jesus. Years later, the apostle Peter would talk about the writings of the apostle Paul (2 Pet. 3:15–16). And do you know what Peter called Paul's letters? "Scripture"!

When it comes to the New Testament, the writings of Jesus's disciples are God's word. So we can't say, "I trust Jesus, but I don't trust the Bible." That makes no sense.

Why? *Because Jesus—the all-powerful, all-knowing Lord—said that you can trust the Bible.* Everything the Bible says about salvation is true and right.

PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, thank you for guiding the men
who wrote the Bible. Help me read and trust
what you've said. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*How does Jesus's relationship to the Old and New
Testaments strengthen your faith in God's word?*

DAY 27

Jesus's Influence

After thinking about the last two day's readings, someone might reply, "Well, that's fine for Jesus and the disciples back then, but what about Christianity today?" That's a good question. There are lots of religions today. So what makes Christianity (and its salvation) true?

Jesus talked about that too.

Listen to what he told his disciples: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). In this verse Jesus made a promise: "I will build my church." And the fact is that nothing's been able to destroy the church. The Bible is really honest about this fact.

In the book of Acts, we read about lots of problems and people that threatened to stop Jesus's church. Sinful people inside the church couldn't stop it (Acts 5). Injustice in the church couldn't stop it (Acts 6:1–7). Evil religious leaders couldn't stop it (Acts 7:54–8:8). Proud King Herod, who murdered Christians, couldn't stop it (Acts 12). Disagreements in the church couldn't stop it (Acts 15). Hatred, lies, and citywide riots couldn't stop it (Acts 19). Long prison sentences couldn't stop it (Acts 23–26). Shipwreck and death couldn't stop it (Acts 27–28). The church is filled with imperfect people (John 20:24–29; Acts 15:36–41), and it's opposed

Christianity

The teachings, beliefs, and practices of the followers of Jesus as explained in the Bible.

by wicked people. But no matter what happens, Jesus will build his church.

So you can trust that promise. Christianity is true and the church will grow because Jesus will keep his word.

Now stop for a moment and think about how Jesus's church has also benefited the world.

Most modern views about human rights are rooted in Christianity. The standard legal court system—with its view of justice—is rooted in Christianity. Common views of education and medical care—with the emphasis on compassion and help—are rooted in Christianity. The traditional view of the family is rooted in the Christian view of marriage and children.

So is Christianity true and trustworthy? Look back at history. For two thousand years, the church has faced all sorts of threats, flaws, and dangers. Yet the church remains and is growing. Why? Because even today, Jesus continues to keep his promise: He is building his church through the gospel. Christianity is true.

And look around you. The church has also made the world a better place. Christianity, with its gospel message of salvation through Jesus alone, is true and it's also *good*.

Because Jesus is the all-powerful, all-knowing Lord, you can trust both the Bible and his promise to build his church.

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, thank you for building the church
and for using the church to help the world.
Help me to serve, doing good deeds, like you
did. And help me to speak, sharing the good
news, as you did. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*Jesus's church is filled with imperfect people. How
does knowing this help you be more understanding
with the flaws and failures of others?*

Question 10

**Can I Ever Lose
My Salvation?**

DAY 28

Protected

This is a scary question. Yet it's one we have to think about. Because some verses in the Bible can leave you puzzled—and terrified. Jesus said, "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12:32). You might wonder, "Are there really sins that can never be forgiven? And have I ever done something like this?"

Yet this Bible verse and others that might sound like someone can lose their salvation (like Heb. 6:4–8) all describe the same kind of person. These are people who look and sound like Christians, but then they turn their backs on Jesus. This is no accident or mistake. Instead, they don't want to live like a Christian any more. And they continue to reject Jesus (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Jude 4).

If this sounds like very bad news, it is.

Yet here's some good news for you. People who turn their backs on Jesus don't care about Jesus. They don't worry about whether they're Christians.

So if you are concerned that you might have committed the "unforgivable sin," then you haven't! Being worried about it means that you haven't turned your back on Christianity. No one who turns to Jesus gets turned away (John 6:37).

Preservation

The work of God
that protects
his people and
preserves their
salvation.

Well, maybe that makes *you* feel better. But what about *other* people? Does the Bible teach that other people can lose their salvation? The apostle John gives us a second bit of good news. No real Christians can ever stop being Christians. John tells us what's really going on (at the deeper, more complex level) when people turn their backs on Jesus. The people who leave Christianity were really never Christians to begin with (1 John 2:19).

Have you been scared that perhaps you've lost your salvation? You think that maybe you've been too bad or didn't believe enough? If so, then let the words of Jesus Christ himself encourage you:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:27–28)

Can Christians lose their salvation? Here's the Bible's answer: ***No, you can't lose your salvation. Jesus protects you.*** When God starts someone in the Christian race, that person finishes the course (Rom. 8:28–30; Phil. 1:6).

PRAYER

Father, thank you for holding me in your mighty hand—safe and secure. Help me to continue to follow you all the days of my life. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

If a friend told you that she was afraid she might have committed the unforgiveable sin or lost her salvation, what would you say? What questions would you ask? How would you handle that situation?

DAY 29

Relocated

A few years ago, I read a book about a British spy living in Russia.¹ He pretended to work for the Russian secret service, but instead he was quietly sending messages to London. For years, no one in Russia knew that he was a double agent. Then one day, someone spilled his secret. Suddenly, he had to flee for his life. He escaped, hidden away in the trunk of someone's car. He left Russia and never returned again.

What does this have to do with the question, “Can I lose my salvation?”

Remember, what happened to you when you became a Christian? The Holy Spirit united you to Christ. Romans 6:5 says, “For if we have been united with him [Jesus] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

When Jesus died on the cross, all Christians (everyone united to him) also died. When Jesus was raised, we were raised. Then he went up to sit beside his Father's throne in heaven. And so now, we are seated there with him too (Eph. 2:6). This is really, actually true—spiritually. The spiritual reality for all Christians is this: What happened to Jesus also happened to us. And where Jesus went, we went.

It's like we escaped the kingdom of sin and death, hidden in the trunk of Jesus's car. Not exactly, but you get the idea.

How does that answer the question about whether we can ever lose our salvation?

Read what the apostle Paul said in Romans 6:9–10: “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.”

To deal with sin, Jesus came into this kingdom of sin and death. He did that once. And he’s never coming back into that kingdom again. Of course, one day, he’s coming back to destroy that evil kingdom and set up his own kingdom across the universe! But he’s never coming back to live in this sinful kingdom ever again.²

If you are united to Jesus, you’re never going back either. In salvation you’ve actually changed kingdoms. “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). You are now a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20), and you should live that way (Rom. 6:11–14).

So can you lose your salvation? *No, you can’t lose your salvation. Jesus protects you because you’re united to him.* Since Jesus isn’t going back, neither are you.

Kingdom

The rule and dominion of God the King where he lives with his people and blesses them.

PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, thank you for uniting me to
Jesus. Thank you for keeping me safe and
never letting me go back to the kingdom of
sin and death. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

REFLECT

*What other analogies could communicate
how you are united to Jesus?*

DAY 30

Enabled

If you can't lose your salvation, then does it really matter what you do or say? If you're "never going back," do you really *need* to have a life of strong Christian faith?

The apostle Peter gives us a great answer to those questions:

According to his great mercy, [God] has caused us to be born again . . . to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, *kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation* ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet. 1:3–5)

There's a lot in those verses, but let's focus on the words in italics. One day God is going to bring his kingdom down to earth. Until then, our inheritance is "kept [or protected] in heaven." It's safe there in heaven, but what about us here on earth?

We too are being protected, "being guarded"! What is protecting us? "God's power" (1 Pet. 1:5). The massive might of almighty God is guarding our souls. He holds us in his hands (John 10:27–29).

Yet 1 Peter 1:5 says something more. You are also guarded by God's power "through faith." How does almighty God keep you safe? He gives you the strength to continue believing in Jesus.

Perseverance

The work of God to help Christians continue in the faith, repenting and believing in Christ.

So which is it? Are you safe because God protects you or because you believe?

Have you ever seen a mom holding a baby that's maybe a few months old? Is the baby safe from falling? Of course. Why? Well, in your mind, picture the mom and baby. Who's doing the holding? The mom

is holding the baby. And the baby is holding onto the mom. They're both holding on. But the safety of the baby is not in the baby's grip, is it? The security of the baby comes from the grasp of the mother.³

No matter how weak your faith might be, true Christians—those held by God—will never fall away from God (Ps. 63:8). And true Christians will also always keep believing in God. Weak faith is still faith.

You may have heard the saying, "Once saved, always saved." That's true. But this saying is also true: "Once saved, always repenting and believing." You are protected by God—*through faith*.

So, can you lose your salvation? ***No, you can't lose your salvation. Jesus protects you because you're united to him and because he enables you to trust in him.***

You're in his arms, and he'll never let go. So don't look at your faith (your baby arms). Instead, hold tight and rely on the one who's holding you.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for holding me in your mighty arms. Thank you for enabling me to believe and to hold onto you. Help me to keep believing until you make all things new. In Jesus's name. Amen.

REFLECT

*What does the example of the
mom and baby teach you?*

Key Words About Salvation

adoption: God's work to make you a member of his family.

belief: Turning to God by relying on him and trusting his word.

Christianity: The teachings, beliefs, and practices of the followers of Jesus as explained in the Bible.

communion with God: Enjoyment of the relationship you have with God, through Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

conversion: The moment when you became a Christian, when you—through faith and repentance—were converted.

doctrine: The truths and teachings of the Bible.

doubt: Uncertainty about whether something is really true.

fellowship: The family relationship or partnership that Christians have with God and with one another.

glorification: The future work of salvation where believers are given new bodies and freed from all the effects of sin forever.

gospel: The “good news”—an amazing announcement—of salvation through Jesus Christ.

grace: God's undeserved goodness toward guilty people.

incarnation: This refers to when Jesus took a human nature. Jesus is "God with us" (Matt. 1:23), fully God and fully human.

intercession: The prayers of one person for another.

just: What is fair, good, and right.

justification: God's declaration that you are righteous because you belong to Jesus and he was declared righteous.

kingdom: The rule and dominion of God the King where he lives with his people and blesses them.

Lord: An authority who is in control—a master, ruler, or king.

patience: The ability to kindly endure something over time.

perseverance: The work of God to help Christians continue in the faith, repenting and believing in Christ.

preservation: The work of God that protects his people and preserves their salvation.

regeneration: The work of God the Holy Spirit that gives new life to spiritually dead sinners.

repentance: Turning away from sin and your own way.

saint: A holy one, one who belongs to God.

salvation: Through Christ, God rescues rebels from the penalty, power, and presence of sin.

sanctification: The process of growing to be more holy, to be more like Jesus.

Savior: The name *Jesus* means “the Lord saves.” He’s our rescuer and deliverer from sin and death.

Scripture: The Bible, including the Old and New Testaments; the writings that are the very words of God.

testimony: A firsthand retelling of what a witness saw or heard.

trials: The hardships and sufferings that we all experience because we live in a sinful and broken world.

union with Christ: Being connected to Christ by faith so that Christ identifies with us and we with him.

10 Questions About Salvation (with Answers)

1. What is salvation?

Salvation is when King Jesus lovingly rescues people who've rebelled against God and he changes their hearts to love and obey their King and to enjoy him forever.

2. Is Jesus the only way to salvation?

Since the God-man, Jesus Christ, was really raised from the dead, his resurrection shows that he is the only true way to salvation.

3. How do I become a Christian?

You enter the kingdom of God (get on the gospel train) by repenting (turning away from your kingdom) and believing the good news about Jesus Christ (turning to God).

4. What does it mean to really believe?

It means to believe the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ and personally depend on him to save us from our sin. And that same trust in Jesus should always result in effort to live for Jesus.

5. How can I be sure that I am a Christian?

Sometimes even strong Christians go through times of doubt, so don't panic. And don't try to go back and start over. If you've already begun the race, keep running away from sin and toward the loving Father who brought you into his family.

6. How should being a Christian affect my daily life?

Live out your identity as part of God's family (union with Christ) and then seek to enjoy the relationships of that family—by loving God and the brothers and sisters around you (communion with Christ and his family).

7. If I'm a Christian, won't my struggles go away?

Christians are saints and sinners and sufferers—all swirled together. And through all that swirl, Jesus will always help us.

8. If God is loving and powerful, why doesn't he just save everybody?

When it comes to sinners, God gives them time, and God gives them what they want. And for those who will turn to him, God also gives amazing mercy.

9. How can I be sure that Christianity is true?

Because Jesus is the all-powerful, all-knowing Lord, you can trust both the Bible and his promise to build his church.

10. *Can I ever lose my salvation?*

No, you can't lose your salvation. Jesus protects you because you're united to him and because he enables you to trust in him.

Notes

Question 1: What Is Salvation?

1. Adapted from John Piper, *God is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 15.

Question 4: What Does It Mean to Really Believe?

1. This illustration is adapted from this video by Mark Dever: "Are Yahweh and Allah the Same Deity?," Youtube video, March 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/>.
2. Adapted from Jerry Bridges, *The Disciplines of Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 127–28.

Question 5: How Can I Be Sure That I Am a Christian?

1. Adapted from Michael P. V. Barrett, *The Gospel According to Exodus: Misery, Deliverance, Gratitude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 115–16.
2. For more on this, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

Question 6: How Should Being a Christian Affect My Daily Life?

1. Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 35–51, 57.

Question 7: If I Became a Christian, Won't My Struggles Go Away?

1. For more on this concept, see Michael R. Emlet, *Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners: Loving Others as God Loves Us* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2021).

Question 9: How Can I Be Sure That Christianity Is True and All Other Religions Are False?

1. See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 55–56.
2. Justin Taylor, “Is C. S. Lewis’s Liar–Lord–or–Lunatic Argument Unsound?,” The Gospel Coalition, February 1, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>.

Question 10: Can I Ever Lose My Salvation?

1. Ben Macintyre, *The Spy and the Traitor: The Greatest Espionage Story of the Cold War* (New York: Crown, 2018).
2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 6, The New Man* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972), 93–105.
3. Richard Sibbes, “A Heavenly Conference Between Christ and Mary After His Resurrection,” in *The Works of Richard Sibbes* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973), 6:349.

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