

"The Journey"

Part 1 - "The Beginning"

Memory Verse: Philippians 1:6 - Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Without question, life is a gift from God. There are many people that may disagree with that statement perhaps because of what they believe life has "dealt" them. Life is not always easy and nowhere in the Bible does it say that it will be. Life can however be fulfilling and rewarding and what we invest in it we will certainly get out of it. The Apostle Paul described the reaping and sowing of the Christian life and this also explains life in general. We know that the way that we live will have a direct connection to our quality of life. However, we also know that good living does not always shelter us from bad experiences.

The Christian life is made up of the expected and the unexpected. God has an amazing ability of keeping us on our spiritual toes. One day all may be well with us and the next thing you know, the bottom may drop out and we experience a trial that we think will never end. It is the will of God that we learn and grow to succeed in the Christian life. Learning and growing will equip us to respond correctly to life's challenges. Someone has wisely said that success in the Christian life is to glorify God and to find His will and do it. I would agree with this statement, but sometimes things are easier to say and more challenging to do.

This series of lessons entitled "**The Journey**" will hopefully give us an opportunity to learn about some of the experiences of the Christian life. Some we may be familiar with and some perhaps not so familiar. Either way, our objective will be to gain more knowledge and understanding, better equip ourselves for "**The Journey**" and better equip ourselves to be godly examples for others in order that our lives may glorify God.

So where do we start? We start where the Christian life starts.

Philippians 1:6 - Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

In this verse the Apostle Paul gives us a clear description of the "big picture" concerning the Christian life. This verse speaks to a beginning, "begun a good work in you;" and it also speaks of the reality of an end to our earthly journey when he says, "**will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.**" The word "perform" speaks to God who "began that good work in us" **completing**

it until the day of Jesus Christ. So then, we know that there is a beginning and we know that there is a completion and we can describe the life that takes place between these two experiences as "**The Journey**"; the time that God allots you and I to make a difference in this world for His glory and the help of others.

During this journey there are so many unknowns. There are so many things for us to learn regarding not just living the Christian life but also responding to the many experiences in life. I will never claim to be an expert when it comes to living a flawless life and I would also admit that much of my learning has been the hard way. However, I have now come to the place of admission and transparency with God and now for the help of others that had I done a few things different in my journey, the last forty years may have been a little easier and a little less challenging. With that said, I feel blessed to be able to pass on some of these things to others in order that they might learn and grow, have a better understanding of the Christian life.

Part 1 - The Beginning

There can be no journey if there is no beginning. The Bible speaks from cover to cover about a real change in a person's life that has placed their faith in God. For any person that is trying to overcome the strongholds of life, the habitual behavior, the struggle to stop something they may have started a long time ago or even recently, there must be a change. At the outset of our study never forget the following truth, little or nothing changes if a person does not change.

When we read the Bible, we see the undeniable way that the Bible divides people into two classes with a very sharp line of distinction between them. Read in the Gospels and you will find the mention of sheep lost and sheep found, guests refusing the invitation and guests feasting at the table. We read of those who are "dead in trespasses and sin," and of others to whom it is said, "And you has He quickened," (**Ephesians 2:1**) so that some are alive to God and others are in their natural state of spiritual death. We find those spoken of as being either in darkness or in light. And the phrase is used of "being brought out of darkness into marvelous light." (**Ephesians 5:8**) Some are spoken of as having been formerly aliens and strangers (**Ephesians 2:12**) and having been made fellow citizens and brethren. We read of "children of God," in contrast to "children of wrath."

We read of believers who are not condemned and of those who are condemned, already, because they have *not believed* (**John 3:18**). We read of those who have "gone astray," and of those

who have "returned to the shepherd and bishop of their souls." (1 Peter 2:25) We read of those who are "in the flesh and cannot please God," (Romans 8:8) and of those who are chosen and called and justified. The Apostle Paul speaks of "us who are saved," (1 Corinthians 1:18) as if there were some saved while, upon others, "the wrath of God abides." (John 3:36) "Enemies" are continually placed in contrast with those who are "reconciled to God by the death of His Son." (Romans 5:10) There are those that are "far off from God by wicked works," and those who are "made near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 1:13)

The distinction between the two classes runs through the whole Bible, but never do we find a *hint* that there are some who are naturally good and do not need to be removed from the one class into the other, or that there are persons between the two who can afford to remain as they are. There must be a beginning! The following is perhaps the clearest evidence that we have in the word of God.

John 3:5-7 - Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

We can willfully dodge and neglect our responsibility in many areas of life and perhaps escape some of the consequences for doing so, but we will never escape if we were to reject God's offer of grace. His offer is free, and our responsibility is to respond correctly, most importantly, the way His Bible teaches and invites us to respond. It is impossible to experience the change that God promises without a personal relationship with Him. Notice that I did not say that people cannot change what they do without God; however, I would say that a person can not change from the inside out without a true salvation experience with the living God.

So then, were I to ask you today; do you know that Jesus Christ is your Savior and that your sins are forgiven, what would your answer be? If your answer is yes, it can only be yes because there was a time in your life when you responded to what God has already done in order for you to have a relationship with Him. His gift of salvation is freely given and freely received. We cannot earn our way to heaven by being good enough and we do not keep ourselves from heaven by being bad enough, it is a gift that we willfully receive.

Consider what the Bible says:

Pause and think if there has ever been a time in your life when you know that you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior. Not a time that you remember having some religious experience or a time that you called out to God for help in a time of desperation, most of us have done that and God invites us to do that.

- Was there a time when you learned that you are a sinner?

Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

- Was there a time when you learned that the penalty for your sin was to be separated from God for eternity?

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin [is] death; but the gift of God [is] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Was there a time when you learned that God loves you so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for your sin?

Romans 5:8 - But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

- Was there a time when you called out to God and asked Him to forgive you and you received Jesus Christ as your Savior?

John 1:12 - But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Romans 10:9,10&13 - That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

If you remember a time in your life when you made that decision, briefly describe that experience as you remember it.

If you have never made the decision to trust Jesus Christ as you Savior, look up the following verses in the Bible and see for yourself what God's words says about your need for forgiveness. Then place an (X) by the statement to signify that you agree with that statement.

Romans 3:23 - I do believe that I am a sinner _____

Romans 6:23 - I do believe that there is a penalty for my sins _____

Romans 5:8 - I do believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins _____

John 1:12, Romans 10:9,10&13 - I do believe if I ask God to forgive me of my sins and receive Jesus Christ as my Savior that I will be saved _____

If you placed an (X) by each of these statements then why not, right now, pray the following prayer and ask God to forgive you of your sins and receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

Dear God,

I believe I am a sinner, and you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for my sins, that He was buried and that He rose from the grave. Please forgive me of my sins. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life and I receive Him as my Savior. Thank you for dying for me, thank you for saving me and please help me to learn how to live the Christian life.

Friend if you just prayed that prayer, according to God's word the Bible, you are His child, and He is your heavenly Father. You now have the privilege of a new beginning!

The first thing that you need to do as a follower of Jesus Christ is be baptized. Following our salvation experience we are commanded to be baptized. I would strongly encourage you to make this commitment and follow through with it the first available opportunity you have to do so. The following questions are frequently asked concerning baptism.

Why is it so important to be baptized?

- To follow the example set by Christ:

Mark 1:9 - And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

- Because Christ commands it:

Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

- It demonstrates that I really am a believer:

Acts 2:41 - Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

What is the meaning of baptism?

- It illustrates Christ's burial and resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:3,4 - For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

Colossians 2:12 - Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

- Baptism does not make you a believer; it shows that you already believe. Baptism does not "save" you, only your faith in Christ does that. Baptism is like a wedding ring; it is the outward picture of the commitment you made to trust Christ as your Savior.

Why be baptized by immersion?

- The original word for baptize in the New Testament means "to immerse or dip under water". Jesus was baptized that way. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water."

Matthew 3:16 - And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

- Every baptism in the Bible was by immersion.

Acts 8:38,39 - And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

- It best symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Who should be baptized?

- Every person who has believed in Christ.

Acts 2:41 - Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:12,13 - But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

When should I be baptized?

- At your earliest convenience after you have been saved.

Acts 2:41 - Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

- There is no reason to delay. As soon as you have decided to receive Christ into your life, you can and should be baptized. If you wait until you are "perfect", you'll never feel good enough or be good enough!