

A dramatic photograph of three crosses on a hill at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong backlight effect on the crosses. The sky is filled with warm, golden light and some clouds. The foreground is dark, showing the silhouettes of the crosses and the hill.

JESUS-CENTERED

B E L I E F

CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Jesus-Centered Belief | 1 |
| Baptism..... | 3 |
| The Bible | 5 |
| Prayer | 8 |
| The Holy Spirit..... | 10 |
| Time With Jesus..... | 12 |



JESUS-CENTERED BELIEF

Why is the term “Jesus-Centered” so important? Simply put, when Jesus is our main focus, it transforms every part of our lives. To learn more about who Jesus is, visit hopefellowship.net/jesus.

When we choose to follow Jesus and allow Him access to our lives, He changes us from the inside out. New patterns in our lives begin to take shape. Old habits that are detrimental to our lives become less enticing. It’s not an immediate change, but gradually our lives become centered around Jesus. We gain a new perspective and see the world in a way that allows us to choose virtues that we once thought were unattainable. We gain peace, hope, and joy that anchor our identity. In short, we begin to experience what the Bible calls an “abundant life.”

Objectively, this sounds like an amazing way to live. So, where do we begin? It all starts with Jesus-Centered Belief. For some, this is a journey that starts with a specific moment of committing one’s life to following Jesus. For others, it happens over time as they make gradual changes. If you have begun or wish to begin this process, we want to help you follow Jesus and move toward the center of God’s purpose for your life.

This is a life-long journey that grows deeper over time. No one will ever “have it all figured out.” That’s not really the point. The point is getting to know Jesus through His life and teachings so that we can understand who God has made us to be. There will be times where we feel like we’re making great strides forward and times when we feel unworthy of God’s love because of guilt and shame. Every journey has ups and downs. But as we commit to the journey, we start to become more like Jesus.

Here are some core beliefs that help us get started on this journey: We believe that God created the world and everything in it, including humans. God created us because He wanted to live in relationship with us. That relationship started with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and it was broken by sin. However, God did not give up on us. Instead, He set a plan in motion to restore our relationship with Him.

The ultimate fulfillment of that plan happened through Jesus, God's Son. Jesus came into the world to live as one of us. He lived a perfect life and modeled for us what is good. At the end of Jesus' life, He was crucified on a cross and took the punishment that we deserve for our sin. Jesus then rose from the grave and defeated death once and for all. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, our relationship with God was restored. And He gives us the promise of life after this one where there is no more sorrow, death, or pain. It will be the perfect fulfillment of God's plan for creation.

This is why Jesus-Centered Belief is so important. Jesus invites us into a beautiful way of life that helps us understand our purpose. He helps us to see why God made us and how we can live in harmony with Him. By centering our beliefs around Jesus and learning to live like He did, life starts to make more sense. Our problems don't magically go away and our circumstances don't always change. But we change, and that is so much better. We become more equipped to face each challenge with wisdom and love. Our identity is secure and gratitude and contentment begin to shape our view of the world. It is truly the most incredible way to live.

Jesus invites you into this life and we're here to help along the way. As you walk this path, do not be discouraged with the obstacles and setbacks. Our faith in Jesus is something that is worked out over time. And we don't walk the path alone. Communities of Jesus-followers exist everywhere to encourage one another. As you commit to this journey, we will outline in this booklet more steps that will help you. There is a lot to learn and understand, but

there is no timeline or completion date. Settle in for the journey ahead knowing that it leads to something good.

If you would like to talk to a pastor about this decision,
[CLICK HERE.](#)

2

BAPTISM

Water baptism is an ancient sacrament of the Church. The early church used the term sacrament to describe different traditional rituals. These rituals served as proof of what God has done in someone's heart. The story of God and the life of Jesus teach us that water baptism is a powerful symbol of what God is doing in the life of a believer. It is also a type of initiation into the community of faith.

Often, practices that serve as symbols are too easily dismissed. Where there is symbolism there tends to be suspicion or contempt. We rationalize that symbolic acts are insignificant, but this is far from the truth. Symbols are all around us and carry significant weight in our lives. As we begin the Jesus-Centered journey, water baptism is a type of symbol that allows us to publicly express our commitment to Jesus and the church.

The Jewish community was well acquainted with the symbolism of water. When water comes to mind, thoughts of the flood (Genesis 6), the crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 3) and priesthood rites (Exodus 29:1,4) come right along with it. In all this history,

the Jewish community recognized water as a symbol of “crossing over” into something new. Even now, water continues to serve as a reminder of a “fresh start” and a new beginning. Through the act of baptism, we cross over from our old life of sin and selfishness. We leave everything behind and move into a new type of promised land marked by following and reflecting Jesus.

Even Jesus himself was baptized as an example for us to follow. In Matthew 3, Jesus approaches John the Baptist and gets baptized in the Jordan. This is a significant turning point in the life of Jesus. Shortly after He would cross over into what is considered His earthly ministry. We can take a step toward Jesus by following Him into the waters of baptism.

Baptism is not simply an example to follow, but an instruction Jesus gave us. Before Jesus ascended into Heaven, these were some of His last words to his disciples: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28:18)

All too often, our personal faith becomes a private matter. Although faith is deeply personal, it is anything but private. Throughout God’s story Christians are considered “brothers and sisters” in Christ. When we accept what Jesus did on the cross, we are welcomed into God’s family. When we make the choice to get baptized, the church community comes together to celebrate. Baptism is an invitation not only into a life that follows Jesus, but a community that follows Jesus!

Following Jesus is a deeply personal and communal experience. This symbol was intended to bring us together as a church and serve as a declaration to the world about who we are. Through baptism, we do not simply believe the message of Christ but become it!

As we follow Jesus, baptism becomes a significant mile marker in our faith journey. Although it is a stand alone event, we are meant to carry it with us. So whether you were baptized at a young age, made the decision as an adult, or you're still considering taking this step in your faith, let baptism serve as a reminder that because of the sacrifice of Jesus, we are restored and made new!

If you would like to sign up to be baptized at Hope Fellowship, [CLICK HERE](#).



In order to become more like Jesus, we must first get to know Him. The best place to start is the Bible. There are three great questions to ask when desiring to gain a better understanding of God's Word: what is the Bible, how should I go about reading it, and how does the Bible help me understand Jesus.

1. What is the Bible?

First, the Bible is the true and authoritative rule of faith and conduct for all of humanity. It is divinely inspired by God in order to teach us what is true, help us realize sin in our lives, correct us when we need it, and help us to do what is right (2 Timothy 3, 1 Thessalonians 2, 2 Peter 1). God uses His Word, the Bible, to prepare and equip His people to do good works.

The Bible is broken up into 2 parts - the Old Testament and the New Testament. In total, it is a collection of 66 books that serve

as both a historical record and an interpreter of God and His ways. But it doesn't stop there. The Bible is living and active, and what God said to others in the past He now says to us through His Word (Hebrews 4:12).

2. How should I go about reading it?

- **Pick a translation that you understand.** At Hope Fellowship, we often teach from the New Living Translation (NLT) version.
- **Establish a reading plan and rhythm.** This allows you to structure your study and ensures consistent progress. This could be achieved by a one-year reading plan, a book-by-book approach, starting with the New Testament, or another method altogether. Once you have that sorted, try to establish a consistent time and place for when you will read.
- **Engage with what you're reading.** Whether by highlighting or underlining, taking notes or asking questions, interacting with what you're reading helps to deepen your understanding and connection.
- **Reflect.** Make time after your reading to contemplate what you just read, consider how it challenges or encourages you, think about practical ways to apply the teaching to your daily life, and perhaps even journal your thoughts at the end.
- **Understand the context.** This helps to avoid misinterpretations and provides a clearer understanding of what you're reading. One way to better understand Biblical context when reading Scripture is to follow the Interpretive Journey. The Interpretive Journey is a method of Bible Study that allows you to take the meaning for the biblical audience and to determine a legitimate meaning for today. It utilizes 4 questions:
 1. What did what you just read mean to the biblical audience?
 2. What are the differences between the biblical audience and us today?

3. What is the principle in the text?
4. How should individual Christians today apply the principle in their lives?

3. How does the Bible help me understand Jesus?

How we view the Bible is important. The Bible is God's story to His people. Throughout scripture there is one overarching narrative of God's plan for the redemption of His people and Jesus is the pivotal character. It is because of Jesus that we have life and hope.

The story of His life is found in the first four books of the New Testament. If you've never read the Bible, reading the stories of Jesus is a great place to start. Not only do we see the incredible power of His teachings, but we also see how He lived as one of us. He shows us the way to live and how to build a relationship with God.

In order to dive deeper into the Bible and understand what you're reading, a final recommendation would be to utilize study tools. Some examples include: a study Bible that gives notes and explanations within the Bible pages, or utilizing a Bible app that provides a multitude of study resources to go alongside what you're reading (like [youversion.com](https://www.youversion.com) or the ["How To Read the Bible" series by Bible Project](#)). Using study tools can help enhance your comprehension and engagement with what you're reading in the Bible.

Information alone does not produce transformation. In order to grow, you've got to put what you're learning into practice. Reading the Bible can last 5 minutes or it can last an hour or more - that part is completely up to you. Wherever you're at on your spiritual journey, start where you are!

4 PRAYER

Prayer is a timeless tradition found in many religions. In each faith, prayer acts as a way to connect with a higher power. As we journey with Jesus, we discover a sweet invitation to prayer that is not dependent upon our past, our doubts or our religious pedigrees.

The life of Jesus offers us many insights into how Jesus prayed and how we can approach prayer today. One of the most common ways we understand prayer is through praying on our own. Often we see Jesus escape to a solitary place to pray. We find Him on several occasions getting away with God. In a time where we are more distracted than ever, we must step away from the noise and spend time with God. Find an intimate space to listen to, talk with and rest in God's presence undistracted.

In the gospels, Jesus provided a blueprint for how we ought to pray once we're in that quiet place. He instructs us that prayer involves gratitude, giving thanks and presenting your requests to God. In fact, in Matthew 6:10-13, He gives us a blueprint for how to pray.

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

The disciples who walked alongside Jesus were more familiar with a different type of prayer, communal prayer. This type of prayer is practiced as a community, through repetition and honoring tradition. Each day, many times a day, those who followed God

would stop to pray the same prayers passed down from one generation to the next. They would also spend time in prayer together. Matthew 18:19-20 says, *I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.*

Jesus offers us an intimate and communal example of a life of prayer and through His sacrifice He opened up an entirely new way of living. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection, we have access to the Holy Spirit. At any given moment, we can have a conversation with God. In prayer, we invite God not only into private or communal moments, but everything in between. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to *pray without ceasing*. As we practice this, it becomes more than something we do, prayer becomes a lifestyle.

Although the source is debated, a common proverb rings true, "tell me what company you keep and I will tell you what you are." Through proximity and communion, we become like those closest to us. Taking on prayer as a lifestyle has a similar effect. Through proximity and communion we God, who we are, begins to reflect Him.

Over time, we are transformed and our hearts begin to long for what He longs for and in turn we become the hands and feet of Jesus. Dallas Willard said it well, *it would be of course a low-voltage spiritual life in which prayer was chiefly undertaken as a discipline rather than as a way of co-labouring with God to accomplish good things and advancing His kingdom purposes*. Following Jesus insists that prayer plays a vital role in the life of faith. Through intimate, communal and continuous prayer, we are transformed more into His image and follow in His footsteps.



THE HOLY SPIRIT

What image comes to mind when you think of the Holy Spirit? An angel on your shoulder? Jiminy Cricket from the movie *Pinocchio*? It is hard for us to understand things we cannot see so we try to visualize it. But the Holy Spirit is so much more than a voice in our ear. The Holy Spirit IS God.

The Holy Spirit has existed as God Himself since before the beginning of time. We believe that God is three in one and one in three—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We’ve spent time already talking about God the Father and God the Son (Jesus), but the Holy Spirit is an equally important part of the nature of God.

There are many references in the Old Testament to the Spirit of God. (Genesis 1:2, Psalm 139:7, Exodus 31: 3). These verses show us that it has always been God’s desire to be present with His people. But it wasn’t until after Jesus ascended into Heaven that the Holy Spirit came to live in each follower of Jesus individually.

It is crucial to establish that the Holy Spirit is God before discussing the roles He plays in our lives. If we see Him as anything else, we will be vastly underestimating His presence. He is not a ghost. He is not a conscience. He is not a mythical spirit. He IS God. The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the ways of Jesus and guides us into a relationship with God. There are several roles that the Holy Spirit plays in our lives, and the best description we have for those roles comes from the Bible.

Counselor

John 14:16-17 says, *And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive Him because it doesn't see Him or know him. But you do know him, because He remains with you and will be in you.*

In these verses, Jesus describes to His disciples how they will experience God's presence when He is gone. He also refers to the Holy Spirit as the "Counselor." Another way of describing it would be an advocate or a helping presence like a legal counselor. Having access to a "Counselor" is a fantastic gift! He shows us how to live. He counsels us through every situation. Jesus also says that He convicts us of sin. He helps us navigate this complicated and messy life. We won't always get it right, but when we don't He is there to help get us back on course.

Guide

John 16:12 says, *I still have many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.*

This is Jesus continuing His description of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. During Jesus' life, He gave us incredible teachings to follow. But, because life is so complex, we don't have specific instructions for every situation that we could face. Instead, we have something better.

The Holy Spirit provides us with the wisdom to live out and apply truth in each unique circumstance. The Holy Spirit is our guide in life. He is the one that we depend on to show us the way. But unlike a conscience, He is God himself, showing us His will.

God's Presence

Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

This verse gives us the best understanding of how to live our lives with the knowledge of God's presence. When we really understand who He is, we start to see that instead of inviting Him into our lives, it's more about God asking us to be a part of His story. Our bodies and our lives are not our own. This world is not our own. All of these things are gifts from God, and we are invited to live as part of His kingdom.

So how do we recognize the Holy Spirit and communicate with Him? Through prayer, scripture, community, and many other spiritual habits, it becomes more natural. And like anything else in life, all good things take time. So start where you're at. Begin to recognize that God's presence is with you through the Holy Spirit. Over time, you will begin to experience and grow in the blessings that come from living by the Spirit of God.



The goal of the Christian life is to be with Jesus and imitate His character (Ephesians 5:1, 1 Corinthians 11:1). In order to do that, we have to practice a regular rhythm of spending time with God.

Think of it another way: if your goal was to add more muscle or lose weight physically, it takes more than just hoping or wanting for that to happen. It takes commitment, it takes time, it takes a plan. In a word, it takes intentionality. And over time, as you

commit to implementing your training plan, you begin to see the results - you begin to achieve your goal!

The way of Jesus is no different. Time with the Lord is how we become people who are more like Him - in our attitudes, in our thoughts, in our circumstances, in our love for others, in our approach to generosity, etc. To become more like Jesus it is essential that we spend time with Him!

In fact, we even see Jesus Himself model this for us in the New Testament. In Matthew 14, Mark 1, and Luke 5, we see Jesus intentionally withdrawing from the crowds to go and find a quiet place to spend time alone with God. For us to intentionally model our lives after Jesus, we must do the same - making it a habit to spend time alone with God every day.

So what does time with God look like on a daily basis? Here's a good way to start:

- 1. Find a quiet place.**

This could be somewhere in your home or a place nearby that is outdoors, like a park or trail area. The location is not as important as it is to find a place where you will be free from distractions and are able to focus.

- 2. Establish a regular rhythm.**

There's not a right way or wrong way to approach this. If you're a morning person, that might be the better time for you. Maybe the mornings are typically rushed for you so the afternoon or evening is better. In general, the best practice is to ask yourself, "When am I at my best?" And then try and give part of that time to God each day.

- 3. Practice what we've already discussed - the Bible and prayer.**

Developing a daily rhythm of prayer and scripture reading is a great way to practice time with God. It allows you to understand God better. When you pray, praise Him for His character and thank Him for all He's done in your life. Also,

use that time to make requests, confess sin and struggles, and surrender over any areas where you're maintaining control. Daily prayer and scripture reading creates space to listen and reflect. Through His Word and His Spirit, He speaks to us and provides encouragement and comfort. (We have written more on the Bible and prayer in prior sections)

Spending daily time with the Lord helps us turn our idea of following Jesus into a reality by being intentional in our pursuit of God. It takes commitment. It takes a plan. It takes time. No shortcuts! Transformation does not happen overnight. Instead, it happens over time as we choose to be intentional with the time we devote to Him.

So start right where you are. Not where you think you should be or where you wish you were. Find a quiet place, establish a regular rhythm, and practice time with God daily through prayer and the Bible... and if you miss a day or you don't spend as much time as you originally hoped or planned, that's ok! Allow that time to grow as the Lord grows in you. After all, that is the goal! The reward for spending time with God is getting to spend time with God. So enjoy it!

Thanks for taking the time to read through this resource. Do you have more questions or just want to get in contact with someone from Hope Fellowship? [CLICK HERE](#).

If you are ready to begin making Jesus and His teachings the priority in your life, we are here to help. In this resource, we will answer questions like:

HOW DO I START FOLLOWING JESUS?

and

HOW DO I TALK TO GOD?

It's ok to not know all the answers, and it's ok to approach this topic with uncertainty. Our hope is that this resource will guide you along the way.

