

THE ESSENTIALS

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD AND
WHAT THAT MEANS ABOUT US



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INTRODUCTION

WEEK 1

We believe in one God. We believe in God who is eternally existent in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit—each of whom possesses equally all the attributes of deity.

WEEK 2

We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal second person of the trinity, who was begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, and is fully God, but became fully man to save a lost world. We believe that he was crucified and three days later rose from the grave. He ascended into heaven, and will one day return again.

WEEK 3

We believe that the Holy Spirit is the eternal third person of the Trinity, who permanently indwells every believer upon his or her faith in Jesus Christ.

WEEK 4

We believe the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God and that men were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the very words of Scripture. Therefore, we believe the Bible is without error, and is the final authority of faith and practice.

WEEK 5

We believe that mankind was created in the image of God to have fellowship with Him but became alienated in that relationship through sinful disobedience. As a result, man is incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through his own efforts.

WEEK 6

We believe that the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross, provides the sole basis for the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, salvation occurs when people place their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ as sufficient payment for their sin.

WEEK 7

We believe in the bodily resurrection of all men, to the eternal communion with God for the believer, and the eternal separation from God for the unbeliever.

WEEK 8

We believe that every Christian should live for Christ and not for himself. By obedience to the Word of God and daily yielding to the Holy Spirit, every believer should mature and pursue spiritual transformation to the image of Christ.

WEEK 9

We believe the church is the body of Christ, of which Jesus Christ is the head. The members of the church are those who have trusted by faith the finished work of Christ. The purpose of the church is to glorify God by loving Him and making Him known to a lost world.

INTRODUCTION

What you believe about God is the most important thing about you.

It really doesn't matter what you believe about coffee, football or politics. But it DOES matter what you believe about Jesus. This study is intended to help you clarify what you believe. Whether you have only recently chosen to become a follower of Jesus or you've been following Jesus for a while now, getting clear about what you believe will allow you to live life with a more confident faith.

Over the next several weeks, we'll be looking at the bottom-line truths, the non-negotiables of Christianity. While Cross Point's ministry is innovative, what we believe about God is not. Our core beliefs are centered around Christ and His timeless message found in the Bible.

Our source of truth is God's Word, the Bible. At Cross Point we accept this book that has been guiding people's lives and choices for thousands of years as the absolute truth of God. It's not only the story of a God who is consumed with pursuing a loving relationship with people like us, it is also a rock-solid foundation upon which anybody can build a great life. We don't try to conform the teachings of this book to our lives; rather, we seek to conform our lives to the teachings of this book.

This Group study is all about Cross Point's Statement of Faith which describes what we believe is true about God. Our theology (theology is the study of the nature of God and what we believe about Him) is not original to us. Anyone familiar with historic Christian doctrine will find that these statements fall in the center of Christian theology.

While most Christians would agree with our Statement of Faith, there are some areas of theology where mature Christ-followers disagree. We try not to be dogmatic about matters on which Bible-based believers hold differing views. We want our core beliefs to be anchored in Christ and His message as found in and supported by the clearest passages of Scripture. More obscure doctrine or teachings with less support are left to individuals to sort out in their own relationship with God—we take no official position in these areas.

As you journey through this study, you'll find it rich with spiritual truth. Do not try to hurry through these pages, but read them slowly and thoughtfully. Ask yourself throughout, "What difference does this truth make in my life?" and "If I didn't know or believe this, would it matter?"

As you get clearer and clearer about what you believe, you will have a growing appreciation for the magnitude of what God has done to bring you into a relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ.

WEEK 1

We believe in one God. We believe in God who is eternally existent in three distinct persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—each of whom possesses equally all the attributes of deity.

The word God itself is one of the most commonly used words in our language, but for many people, God is a ‘fuzzy’ concept. Some think of God as a shadowy, superhuman cloud or force like the Wizard of Oz. Others think of Him as a ball of fire ready to consume us, or as a sentimental grandfather in the sky. Still others think of God as a celestial policeman just waiting to catch us stepping out of line so that he can whack us. But what is God really like?

QUESTION: HOW DO YOU PICTURE GOD?

The Bible begins with the phrase, “In the beginning, God...” God has always existed—His nature and being are eternal. He never had a beginning and will never have an end. He is transcendent, meaning He is separate from His creation—above and beyond it. At the same time, He is also imminent, which means He is near. He is actively involved in the affairs of this world. He is also the source of all life. His presence and power are seen in creation. Words like supreme and incomparable come to mind.

God is omnipotent—that means all-powerful. God is omnipresent—that means He is fully present everywhere all the time. God is omniscient—that means He knows everything. He is infinite. God is not limited by or confined to the universe He created. God is unchangeable and does not vary. He is not volatile or capricious. His character and His love are constant and dependable.

But perhaps best of all, God is personal—He is a person. We shouldn’t think of Him as some impersonal force behind the universe. God is spirit and at the same time has all the elements of personality—intellect, feelings and will. And God is love. His love and mercy go hand-in-hand with His righteousness and holiness. God’s love was ultimately expressed and personified in Jesus.

The Scripture teaches that three distinct “persons” are called God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Bible also teaches that there is only one God (not three Gods), and so we understand that these three Persons fully share the one and only divine nature. We use the term “Trinity” as a label for the teaching that God has a singular nature but a plural personality.

WEEK 1

God exists as a Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—three distinct persons in perfect oneness and perfect community. God is so in love with this idea of oneness—the wonder of having three persons and yet perfect harmony and intimacy, mutual submission, mutual servanthood and delight—that He wants to extend it. And that is what Creation is about.

QUESTION:

HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE THREE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY--FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT--IN YOUR LIFE?

This creative God desired to share the “community” that always existed within Him, so He made a universe that would reflect His attributes. All that He created is dependent on Him—He made it out of nothing, keeps it together, can reshape it and is Master over it.

At the pinnacle of creation, God made human beings—fashioned in His personal image, with whom He could have a relationship, and who could relate to each other. They would reflect His nature by exhibiting unity in the presence of diversity, love in the midst of differences, ruling while remaining submissive all at the same time.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Knowing God is our highest priority. Substituting any activity or allowing any passion to become stronger is idolatry.

QUESTION: IS THERE ANYTHING IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU’VE ALLOWED TO TAKE PRIORITY OVER YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? IF SO, WHAT? HOW CAN YOU RE-PRIORITIZE KNOWING GOD MORE DEEPLY?

We cannot agree with any teacher or religious group that rejects God’s revelation of Himself as Trinity (as is common among most “cult” groups).

We can count on God to be active throughout our lifetime. He will bless us, and He will bring some good from difficult or evil circumstances. He works in our lives so we develop a vital relationship with Him based on deep trust that supersedes all other loyalties.

QUESTION: WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN GOD TURN A NEGATIVE SITUATION INTO SOMETHING GOOD? HOW DID YOU SEE GOD IN THE MIDST OF THE SITUATION?

WEEK 2

We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal second person of the trinity, who was begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, and is fully God, but became fully man to save a lost world. We believe that he was crucified and three days later rose from the grave. He ascended into heaven, and will one day return again.

Buddha is not essential to the teaching of Buddhism or Muhammad to Islam, but everything about Christianity is determined by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

QUESTION:
HOW DOES CHRISTIANITY DIFFER FROM ANY OTHER RELIGIONS YOU HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE WITH?

Jesus is...

- the author of its teachings.
- the object of its doctrines.
- the origin of its salvation.
- the fulfillment of its hopes.
- the source of its power.
- the founder of its church.
- the one who gave the Holy Spirit as a legacy to those who believe.

Jesus is the “God-Man” who is unlike any person who has or ever will live. He is not part God and part human—He is both fully God and fully human. His birth is evidence of his humanity in that He was born in the normal way from a human mother, yet His divinity is established by virtue of the fact His mother was a virgin who conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit.

In His humanity, He experienced every human limitation except sin. He had a body, soul and spirit and shared our physical and emotional experiences. He got hungry and tired from travel. He needed sleep and food. He experienced love and compassion. He denounced the religious leaders who refused the truth of God and got angry with people who defiled His Father’s house. He wept at the tomb of a friend, and He was troubled in His heart as He faced the cross. He even faced temptation. He was like us in every way except that He never disobeyed His heavenly Father. He was blameless and without sin.

At the same time Jesus possessed all the attributes which belong to God alone. He claimed omnipotence saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew

WEEK 2

28:18) and He demonstrated that power with miracles that showed His authority over nature when He calmed the storm and turned water into wine, over physical disease, over demons, and over death by raising Lazarus, Jairus' daughter and the widow's son. He was omniscient and knew what was in people's minds before they spoke (Mark 2:6-8; John 2:25). And though His physical body limited His ability to be omnipresent, He promised His disciples He would be with them to the end of the age through His Spirit.

QUESTION:

WHAT ORIGINALLY ATTRACTED YOU TO JESUS AND IGNITED YOUR DESIRE TO FOLLOW HIM?

In His divinity, Jesus is co-equal with His Father and the Holy Spirit and has been through all eternity. He did not become the Son of God either at His birth or sometime during His earthly life. He was and is the eternal Son, coexistent and coeternal with the Father and the Spirit.

These verses from Colossians 1:15-20 best describe the unique nature of Jesus...

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

*He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,
for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.*

*He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—*

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

*He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.*

*Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.*

*He is the beginning,
supreme over all who rise from the dead.*

So he is first in everything.

*For God in all his fullness
was pleased to live in Christ,
and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.*

*He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.*

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Here's why it's crucial to have a proper understanding of Christ's person: if He is not fully God and fully man, His life and death would not have eternal and personal significance for us. If Jesus had not been fully God, He could not be our Savior from sin. On the other hand, if He were God and did nothing on our behalf--that is, did not do anything to bring us to God--He would not be our Savior. Jesus not only could save, he did. The whole reason He stepped out of eternity and into time was, as He said, "to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10) and "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

QUESTION:

HOW DID YOU FIRST COME TO CHRIST AND EXPERIENCE HIS FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS?

Jesus' death did not end His existence. After He had paid for our sin on the cross, He rose from the dead on the third day. It is important to understand that the resurrection of Christ was a bodily resurrection, not one of "spirit" or "influence." When the disciples first saw Jesus after His resurrection, they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus told them, "Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do" (Luke 24:39). Then He ate some fish with them. Ghosts don't eat fish!

The implications of the resurrection are enormous. Jesus' bodily resurrection not only shows His complete provision for sin's effects and victory over death itself, it also serves as a prototype of our future resurrection when our bodies will be remade in the same way to live in eternity. Jesus' resurrected body was different from our bodies and from His previous body. For example, when the risen Jesus met with the disciples for the first time after his resurrection, the doors were locked yet he was suddenly with them in person (John 20:19). Paul writes about the subject of the resurrection and our resurrected bodies in 1 Corinthians 15. He also writes about the futility of our lives and faith if Jesus had not risen from the grave in 1 Corinthians 15:17-20.

"And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died."

Jesus' resurrection changes everything. It is the foundation of our faith. Jesus is the only one who has ever predicted his own death and resurrection, and then pulled it off! Because of the resurrection we know we are not trusting in a myth: Jesus is who He said He was, the one and only Son of God. And because of Jesus' resurrection, we can have confidence that our sins are actually forgiven through His death.

WEEK 2

And even now, Jesus is still fully human (though glorified) and fully God. He is active for us before the throne of God. He is the ongoing mediator between us and the Father, always thinking of our needs and always concerned for our well-being. He gives us free and confident access to the very presence of God. He told His disciples before He died that He would prepare a place for us in heaven and said to His disciples, “I will come back and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am” (John 14:3). Jesus’ final words on earth included the promise to return to earth visibly and bodily for the purpose of consummating human history.

QUESTION:

HOW DO THESE TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS AFFECT THE WAY YOU RELATE TO HIM, THE WAY YOU COMMUNICATE WITH HIM?

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

We are Christians (not “Godians”) because our message is about Christ—His work, His divinity, and our need to follow Him. Any message that does not center on Christ, including His full humanity and divinity as well as His forgiveness for all sin, is not the Gospel.

Because our salvation was secured by a perfect sacrifice of a perfect person, we live knowing that we are totally and unconditionally forgiven from sin now, rather than hoping we will be forgiven at some future point. We are secure in the grace of God through Christ.

QUESTION: WHEN YOU REFLECT ON HOW YOU’VE EXPERIENCED CHRIST’S FORGIVENESS, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?

Knowing that Jesus will return some day, we hold on loosely to the things of this world, counting on the new heavens and earth to be our permanent home.

WEEK 3

We believe that the Holy Spirit is the eternal third person of the Trinity, who permanently indwells every believer upon his or her faith in Jesus Christ.

Of the three persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is probably the most difficult to understand. But our awareness of His work in our lives as believers will open us up to experience the abundant life Jesus promised, a life filled with love, joy and peace.

The Holy Spirit is God, not just a “force.” Scripture describes the Holy Spirit with personal pronouns and reveals He has personal attributes. The Holy Spirit is He, not It. He is as much a person as God the Father and God the Son.

QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Holy Spirit is not only a person--He is God. He has the attributes that belong only to deity. He is eternal (Hebrews 9:14). He is omnipresent: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139:7). He is the “Spirit of life” (Romans 8:2) and the “Spirit of truth” (John 16:13). He helped create the universe and humankind: “The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Job said, “The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). In short, He has all the divine power of God.

The Holy Spirit is the One who carries out the purposes and plans of the Godhead. His work is the direct work of God and directly affects each of us as individuals. The Spirit convicts people of their sin. If it weren't for the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't feel guilt for our sin--we wouldn't even know that we are really sinning. Whenever a person comes to a sense of his own sinfulness, the Holy Spirit has been at work.

The Gospel of John records Jesus telling His disciples about the Holy Spirit. He tells them that He is going to leave, but that His leaving will be better for them because then the Holy Spirit will be with them. It's hard to imagine that the disciples would have been too excited to hear that Jesus was leaving, but Jesus knew that the Holy Spirit would be the perfect guide for them. In fact, Jesus said, “It is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) won't come. If I do go away, then I will send Him to you” (John 16:7).

The Spirit is described in Scripture as the Advocate, Comforter, Encourager, Counselor and the Spirit of truth. Jesus said, “He (the Holy Spirit) will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he received from me” (John 16:13-14).

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QUESTION:

HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR LIFE?

The Holy Spirit has a personality. He has a mind, feelings and a will. He can think, he has emotions, and he can choose--the same as God the Father and God the Son. He is not some "impersonal force". He is equal in His personal nature to the Father and the Son.

The work of the Holy Spirit is not as visibly prominent as that of the Father and of the Son. He doesn't desire attention for Himself, but rather is the One who points people to worship the Father and the Son. He works "behind the scenes" to prepare people to hear the Gospel and then applies what Jesus did on the cross to make a new person of anyone who chooses to put their trust in Christ.

Jesus promised the Spirit's presence to all His followers. The moment a person turns to Jesus and places their faith and trust in Him, the Holy Spirit comes into that person's life and permanently takes up residence. The Holy Spirit living within a Christ-follower is described as "God's Spirit living in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The Holy Spirit does things that a person would do. He speaks: "The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'" (Acts 8:29). He strives: "My spirit will not contend with man forever" (Genesis 6:3). He helps: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness...the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Romans 8:26). He reveals, searches and knows: "God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God...No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). He feels sorrow and is grieved by sin in the lives of Christians (Ephesians 4:30), and He intercedes and prays on behalf of others (Romans 8:26-27).

His ministry in us includes helping us understand the Bible, making us aware of things we do that don't please God, assuring us we are God's children, empowering us to share our faith, gifting us to uniquely serve others in the church, helping our prayer life through interceding for us and producing in us the kind of character that makes us credible, persuasive representatives of Jesus Christ.

QUESTION:

WHICH AREA OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S MINISTRY HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED?

WEEK 3

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

We should live our lives with the awareness that the Spirit lives in us and practice listening for His prompting. If we are open to Him and submissive to Him, He will direct our lives.

When we share Christ with others, the message we present is effective not because of our superior reasoning or irresistible presentation, but because of the Spirit being free to work through us and in the heart of the person we're talking to.

QUESTION: WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?

WEEK 4

We believe the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God and that men were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the very words of Scripture. Therefore, we believe the Bible is without error and is the final authority of faith and practice.

Human reason is a powerful tool, but it is distorted by our finite and often self-centered perspective. Reason alone cannot figure out the meaning of life and cannot comprehend who God is beyond the simple awareness that He exists. In other words, our humanness keeps us from having a relationship with God, and we cannot get past our finite limitations to reach Him. So God chose to break through and get to us.

The Bible is the written summary of His attempts to do that. But the Bible isn't just a record of His words, it itself is the Word of God in written form. It is revelation—truth expressed not by means of humans groping in the dark for the right way to say it, but truth given by God Himself as He “carried people along” in their writing. Their message was and is His message.

The Bible originated in God's mind, not in human minds. It was given to us by inspiration. But the Bible is not inspired in the same way we would say the writings of Shakespeare were inspired or the music of The Beatles is inspired. The biblical sense of inspiration means God prompted and guided the writers of Scripture in a way that they wrote what he wanted them to write, disclosing the exact truth he wanted conveyed.

QUESTION:

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BOOK OF THE BIBLE? WHY?

The word inspired literally means ‘outbreathed’ (from the mouth of God). Peter wrote about this when he said, “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). And Paul added, “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The words did not come from the writers themselves: they were inspired words from God.

But God did not dictate the Scripture mechanically. The writers of Scripture were not ‘human typewriters’, but rather, God used their personalities, backgrounds and writing styles and then guided their writing and their choice of words so that all of Scripture is “the very words of God” (Romans 3:2). They recorded the inspired words of God not their own thoughts.

WEEK 4

The people God used to record His words were moved by His words. As they realized that the God of the universe is the One speaking these words they said the Word of God is:

- Honey in my mouth (Exekiel 3:3)
- Spiritual food for the hungry (Job 23:12)
- Dwelling in me richly (Colossians 3:16)
- A lamp for my feet (Psalm 119:105)
- A joy and delight to my heart (Jeremiah 15:16)
- Renewing my mind (Romans 12:2)
- A fire that burns in my heart (Jeremiah 20:9)
- More precious than gold (Psalm 19:10)
- Sharper than any two-edged sword (Hevrews 4:12)
- A great reward (Psalm 19:11)
- True and righteous (Psalm 119:160)
- Penetrating my thoughts and attitudes (Hebrews 4:12)
- Perfect and trustworthy (Psalm 19:7)

QUESTION:

WHICH OF THESE VERSES DESCRIBING THE BIBLE DO YOU RESONATE WITH THE MOST AND WHY?

Because God cannot lie, this written Word is completely reliable, so we must let it judge us instead of us judge it. Though other books, both modern and ancient, may contain helpful spiritual truth, no other writings are “God-breathed” in the way the Bible is. Truth is mixed with error everywhere except in the Bible. That is why we base our beliefs on its teaching and submit all our thoughts and plans to its scrutiny.

All of scripture is inspired, not just some parts. This means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.

The Bible doesn’t just contain the Word of God, it is the Word of God, and it is our sole source of truth. Our faith is rooted in the Bible, but we do not worship the Bible, we trust it. Every new idea and even our emotional experiences should be tested by its teaching: How do my opinions, my worldviews and my actions line up with God’s Word?

QUESTION:

**WHICH OF THE BIBLE’S TEACHINGS ARE EASY FOR YOU TO FOLLOW?
WHICH ARE MORE DIFFICULT?**

WEEK 4

Some skeptics argue that the reason Christians believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God is because the Bible says it is the inspired Word of God. And those skeptics are right to be cautious of this approach. After all, quoting the Bible to prove the Bible assumes the Bible is true, which is really their point of contention. But if the Bible can be shown to be a reliable document, accurately recorded and transmitted through history, from God to us, then we can build a strong case that the Bible is indeed true.

We have copies of the manuscripts and throughout history these copies show that the Bible has been transmitted accurately. Despite common skeptical claims that the Bible has often been changed through the centuries, the physical evidence tells another story. The New Testament records are incredibly accurate. There are minor differences in manuscripts, called variants, but none of these variants impact or change key Christian beliefs or claims.

Physical and historical evidence supports the reliability of Scripture. Over and over, archeology has proven that the Bible is historically accurate.

Although the Bible was written over many centuries by different writers, the messages it contains consistently present a coherent theology. Moreover, the Christian worldview is robust, reasonable and grounded in history.

QUESTION:

EVEN THOUGH THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN CENTURIES AGO, HOW DO YOU FIND ITS TEACHINGS RELEVANT TO OUR CURRENT CULTURE AND YOUR DAILY LIFE?

Although there are other lines of reasoning to support the claim that the Bible is true, one of the most powerful is found in Jesus. If the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – present an accurate record of the life and ministry of Jesus, then Jesus Himself becomes an argument in support of the truth of the Bible. In other words, what the Bible records about Jesus, including what He says about God, human nature, salvation and the Old Testament record, can then be trusted.

So what does Jesus say about God's Word? He testifies to the authority of the Bible when He says, "the Scriptures cannot be altered" (John 10:35). In Matthew 5:17, Jesus affirms the Old Testament law and prophets saying, "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose." Jesus also spoke of the life-giving nature of God's Word when He said, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). These passages and others indicate that Jesus believed God spoke through the Bible. He spoke about Old Testament stories as true events. He revered the Bible as holy and authoritative.

WEEK 4

The cornerstone of Christian faith is the resurrection of Christ. Even Paul the Apostle admitted that if the resurrection did not happen, Christian faith “is useless and you are still guilty of your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). In this sense, making a case for the truth of the resurrection also makes a case for the truth claims of Jesus and, in turn, the reliability and truth of the Bible.

In the same way that food gets into your bloodstream and muscles and fuels your strength, when the Word of God gets inside you it can make you feel whole, satisfied, loved and connected--deep inside. When we read the Bible, we are hearing from God. God has given us everything that we need to know about Him. Even though the Bible was written thousands of years ago, it remains relevant to us today. It is unchanging and always true. We don't try to conform the teachings of this book to our lives, but rather, we try to conform our lives to the teachings of this book.

QUESTION:

OFTEN, INDIVIDUALS WILL IDENTIFY A 'LIFE VERSE' THAT IS PARTICULARLY COMPELLING FOR THEM. DO YOU HAVE A LIFE VERSE? WHICH SCRIPTURE DO YOU MOST CONNECT WITH? WHY DO YOU FIND IT SO MEANINGFUL?

The Bible has been guiding the lives of people for thousands of years as the absolute truth of God. It's not only the story of a God who is consumed with pursuing a love relationship with people like us, it is also a rock-solid foundation upon which anybody can build a great life.

*“Your Word, O Lord, is eternal;
It stands firm in the heavens.”
Psalm 119:89*

WEEK 4

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

It is essential for followers of Christ to regularly read and study the Bible, privately and publicly, to understand its message.

It is not necessary to have any human or priestly intermediary in order for us to know and relate to God—we have His Word, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide us toward understanding it. We are each individually responsible to learn what it says.

All aspects of our life and conduct must be submitted to what the Bible teaches about that area—we must obey what we discover God has commanded.

Messages presented at Cross Point must provide teaching supported by Scripture. We do not accept doctrines, no matter what is claimed as their source, if they are not in agreement with what the Bible says. Supposed “modern prophets,” “new revelation,” or any message—even if apparently given miraculously—must be tested by the Bible.

QUESTIONS:

WHAT DOES YOUR PROCESS FOR READING AND STUDYING THE BIBLE LOOK LIKE?

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST REVELATION YOU HAVE HAD WHEN READING THE BIBLE?

WEEK 5

We believe that mankind was created in the image of God to have fellowship with Him but became alienated in that relationship through sinful disobedience. As a result, man is incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through his own efforts.

Are people just glorified animals, the combination of chemicals and their reactions? As scientists work to decipher the genetic code, are we just a piece of protoplasm evolved by a mere chance collision of random atoms or are we more? Are humans unique in some way? As science gets closer and closer to human cloning, it has never been more important to understand what the Bible says about humankind.

In the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1, God says, “‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.’ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Out of all the creatures God made, only one, humans, are said to be made in God’s image. The fact that humans were created in the image of God means that we are like God and represent God. Adam, the first man, was unique from the rest of creation.

He asked questions, had a sense of right and wrong and had the power of choice. Theologian Wayne Grudem says, “The fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God in the following ways: intellectual ability, moral purity, spiritual nature, dominion over the earth, creativity, ability to make ethical choices and immortality.”

QUESTION:

HOW DO YOU FEEL HUMANS CAN MOST REPRESENT GOD?

Mankind was created with an inner sense of right and wrong, a moral standard. While other animals respond out of fear of punishment or hope of reward, people have a sense of “oughtness.” Whenever you say, “That sort of thing ought not ever happen,” you are affirming that God created you in His image with moral standards.

And humans are unique in that we not only have physical bodies, but also immaterial spirits. God breathed life into humankind in a way that He did not with the animals (Genesis 2:7). We have a spiritual life that enables us to relate to God as persons, and we have immortality; we will not cease to exist but will live forever.

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Also, we have been created with the mental ability to reason and think logically that is unique from the other animals. Animals sometimes exhibit remarkable behavior in solving mazes or working out problems in the physical world, but they do not engage in abstract reasoning. There is no “history of canine philosophy,” for example. Chimpanzees don’t sit around discussing the doctrine of the Trinity. Our likeness to God is illustrated by our use of complex, abstract language, our awareness of the distant future, and the entire spectrum of creative activities in areas like art, music, literature and science. In addition to all that, the degree and complexity of human emotions indicate just how different humankind is from the rest of creation.

Another unique quality of being created in the image of God is that we are relational beings. Just as God is in relationship with himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, He created us to be in relationship with Him and with others. And although animals have some sense of community with each other, God created humankind to experience a whole other level of community. He designed us for the intimacy of marriage and to live together in families, to worship and fellowship together in churches and to experience the bond of friendship. God is love, and He created us with the capacity to give and receive love.

QUESTION:

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING COMMUNITY YOU HAVE BEEN A PART OF?

But God did not create us because He was lonely. He has perfect unity and community with Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He didn’t need to create us, but he chose to. We, and the rest of creation, glorify Him and bring Him joy. Think about how significant your life is because of that fact. We were created to glorify God which means we are important to God. As we glorify God and enjoy Him, He rejoices in us. The prophet Zephaniah says, “He (God) will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”

THE PROBLEM WITH SIN

The common myth that humankind is basically good is not supported by the Bible. We were originally created good, but the first man and woman deliberately chose to disobey God, so we are all now infected with the disease called “sin” and are spiritually separated from God.

God could have made us incapable of sinning and prevented sin from entering the world, but if He had done that, we would not have the freedom of choice which means we would not bear the image of God. We would be robots or talking dolls who speak the same words when someone pulls the string. God created humankind with the ability to choose, and according to C. S. Lewis, though God knew what would happen, He “thought it was worth the risk.”

God is not the author of sin, and if Adam and Eve had not disobeyed God, sin would never have entered the human race. But now we face the fact of evil and sin. Adam and Eve’s decision had tragic results for the entire human race and, in fact, all of creation: “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned” (Romans 5:12).

When David said, “For I was born a sinner--yes, from the moment my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5), he was not speaking of the act of conception as sinful, but that we have all been infected by sin. And while there may be a difference between people in their degree of sin, there is no difference in the fact of sin. “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23). And it’s not that we fall short by a little--the gap is insurmountable.

QUESTION:

DO YOU WRESTLE WITH BEING A SINNER AS IT PERTAINS TO YOUR FAITH?

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The condition of being inherently sinful cannot be remedied through any human effort. Trying to get to God on our own effort is like lining up all of humanity on the West coast and attempting to swim to Hawaii with how far you can swim being determined by how good a life you've lived. Someone with no morals may be drowning in 6" of water just off shore while someone who lived a very moral life may be able to swim for several miles. Regardless, no one makes it to Hawaii on their own. The gap is too huge, the distance too great. And so is the gap between sinful people and a holy God.

Because God is holy, He cannot condone our sin, and because He is just, He cannot ignore our sin. Sin has consequences...eternal consequences: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 3:23a) both physical death and spiritual death--eternal separation from God.

But God didn't give up on the world because of sin and our sinfulness. Instead, He put a plan in place to redeem the world. God himself provided a way to bridge the gap created by our sin. "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners... God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners...For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:6 & 8, 6:23).

God has provided a solution to the problem of our sin and holds it out to each one of us. But the choice is still ours to either walk away from God and try to handle the problem of sin on our own, or to receive His gift of grace, forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus.

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SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Cross Point's message to spiritually curious people always contains the call to turn from fruitless attempts to earn God's favor and to turn without reservation to the perfect and reliable provision of God in Christ.

QUESTION: HOW HAVE YOU TRIED TO EARN YOUR SALVATION IN THE PAST? HOW HAS YOUR VIEW OF SALVATION SHIFTED AS YOU HAVE CONTINUED TO FOLLOW JESUS?

We live secure in the knowledge that the Christian life we live is a "thank you" to God for the salvation He has fully and completely provided. We neither think our obedience "enhances" His provision for us (as if we could add something to the death of Christ) nor treat His grace in a cavalier way (as an excuse to live sinfully).

Knowing we are all sinful, we must never naively assume we're immune to temptation or evil. Though confident of being rescued from the penalty of sin, we carefully conduct our lives mindful of sin's ongoing potential to misdirect us.

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We believe that the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross, provides the sole basis for the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, salvation occurs when people place their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ as sufficient payment for their sin.

There are a lot of familiar logos--the Nike 'Swoosh', McDonald's Golden Arches, Apple's...well, apple. But there may be no more recognizable 'logo' throughout the history of the world than the cross. The cross is the primary symbol of Christianity. It is on the top of church spires. It is the focal point of church sanctuaries. It is the theme of countless paintings and works of art. It is even worn as jewelry. The cross represents the central fact in human history and the uniqueness of Christianity.

Every other religion is a 'do it yourself' proposition. You get on the religious treadmill of self-sacrifice and try your best to work hard and 'run faster and faster' to somehow please and appease whatever god you serve. But in Christianity, salvation is a free gift, not because we deserve it, but because of the overwhelming love of God toward us.

QUESTION:

HAVE YOU EVER FOUND YOURSELF ON THE RELIGIOUS TREADMILL TRYING TO EARN YOUR SALVATION RATHER THAN SIMPLY RECEIVING IT? HOW DID YOU CHANGE YOUR OUTLOOK ON YOUR SALVATION?

It was on the cross that God did for us what we could not do on our own: "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). Through the cross, God provides a way for each one of us to be forgiven and brought into a personal relationship with Him. And all that is based not on what we do but rather on what God through Christ has already done.

Christ's death is spoken of as the substitutionary atonement for our sin. To atone is to make amends. Christ's death on the cross made amends for our sin. And He was our substitute. He died in our place and took our sins upon himself. His death paid the price due for our sin that we could not pay ourselves.

Why would God require blood in order to forgive sin? Leviticus 17:11 is the Old Testament's central statement about the significance of blood in the sacrificial system. God, speaking to Moses, declares: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

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A blood sacrifice meant there was a cost to the one giving the sacrifice. The price of the animal involved represented a price that had to be paid by the one providing the offering. And it cost the animal its life. Each time a blood sacrifice was made, the one giving it was reminded of the cost of sin.

“In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22).

The whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament was symbolic of what would be fulfilled in Christ. The Passover, celebrated at the time of the exodus of enslaved Israelites from Egypt, is the fullest picture of Christ’s sacrifice. Each believing family sacrificed their best lamb and put its blood on the doorposts and lintels of the house. When the angel of death saw the blood, he passed over that household. Those ‘believers’ escaped the judgment of having their firstborn son die.

Christ was the fulfillment of all that the passover lamb stood for. He was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). When people in the Old testament offered sacrifices in faith, they were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, just as we by faith look back to the cross of Christ.

QUESTION:

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST SACRIFICE YOU HAVE EVER MADE? WHAT WAS THE END RESULT AFTER YOUR SACRIFICE WAS MADE?

When Jesus shed His blood on the cross, He did away with the Old Testament requirement for the continual sacrifices of animals. Those Old Testament sacrifices were an annual reminder of sins, but “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:3). Their blood was not sufficient to cover the sins of the people, except on a temporary basis, because sin against a holy and infinite God requires a holy and infinite sacrifice.

Yet while the blood of bulls and goats was a “reminder” of sin, “the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19) paid the debt of sin we owe to God, and we need no further sacrifices for sin. God declares the debt ‘paid in full.’ When Jesus said, “It is finished” as He was dying, He meant just that—the entire work of redemption was completed forever, “having obtained eternal redemption” for us (Hebrews 9:12).

But why couldn’t God just forgive? Isn’t God all-powerful and all-loving? Couldn’t He just pardon sin without requiring a sacrifice? God exercises all His attributes in harmony with each other. Yes, He is all-powerful and all-loving, but He is also all-holy and all-just. We tend to look only at outward acts when we think about sin. God’s view is deeper: He looks on the heart. There are no

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big sins and small sins to a holy God. Holiness means NO sin. *God's holiness and justice demand atonement or payment for sin, and His amazing love and grace provide the payment. His love and His holiness work together in full and complete harmony.*

In the cross of Christ, “love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10). Through the cross, God is both “just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

QUESTION:

HOW DO YOU RECONCILE WITH THE IDEA WE SERVE A JUST GOD?

The cross is God's gift.

If God had left us to ourselves, all of us would continue in disobedience and rejection of Him. The good news is that He has provided a way out of our dilemma through the death of Jesus Christ, which paid the penalty for our sins. Those who by faith personally receive the forgiveness that God offers will be restored to a right relationship with Him.

Faith is central to the whole Christian experience. The word faith means “a confident trust in or reliance on.” Scripture teaches that, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6a). Faith, saving faith, is more than just believing the facts about Christ--His deity, His death, and our need for Him. James writes, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder” (James 2:19). In other words, the demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died on the cross to pay for sin, but they are not saved. Saving faith is more than simply believing or acknowledging certain facts as true. When Jesus said, “whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life” (John 3:16b), He was talking about a faith that involves repentance (turning to God), full commitment to and trust in Christ. That kind of faith is not just intellectual belief but a full surrender of every part of one's life to Jesus--to trust Him completely.

QUESTION:

DESCRIBE WHEN YOU FELT YOUR FAITH GO FROM INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE TO COMPLETE TRUST IN JESUS.

This new life is a gift. It cannot be earned by our activities. “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it” (Ephesians 2:8-9). And it cannot be revoked by our failures. “And I am certain that God, who began the good work

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QUESTION:

HOW DO YOU LIVE OUT REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN YOUR LIFE?

QUESTION:

HOW CAN YOU TELL OTHERS ABOUT THE SALVATION YOU HAVE RECEIVED?

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

We are saved by grace and we live in His grace. Even though we are forgiven, we never naively assume we’re immune to temptation or evil. We have been rescued from the penalty of sin, and we live our lives in Christ mindful of sin’s ongoing potential to trip us up.

Even as followers of Jesus who have trusted Christ for our salvation, it can be easy to step back onto the religious treadmill of trying to earn God’s favor. Jesus asks us to obey, but the reason we obey what Jesus asks us to do is not so that we can earn more of God’s love--God already loves us completely and unconditionally. We obey because through our obedience we personally experience His best for us--the abundant life He promises.

Spiritual disciplines like fasting, solitude, prayer, Bible reading, observing Sabbath, worship, giving and serving are for our own good--to build our faith so that we will experience the rich and satisfying life Jesus promises. God doesn’t love us more when we attend church regularly or love us less if we don’t read the Bible and pray every day. He already loves us completely.

The historical fact of the resurrection is what gives us confidence that our faith in Jesus is not just wishful thinking. Eyewitnesses (including a group of more than 500 people at one time) testified that they saw Jesus alive after he had been crucified and buried. Jesus’ resurrection is proof that He is who He said He is: the one and only Son of God, and He is alive.

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We believe in the bodily resurrection of all men, to the eternal communion with God for the believer, and the eternal separation from God for the unbeliever.

Do you want to go to heaven when you die? Of course! Who doesn't? If you could, would you like to go right now? If you're like most people, you've got a different answer for that second question. And that's pretty normal. Life after death is one of the great 'unknowns', but it's also one of the great promises Jesus gave. He said, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am" (John 14:1-3).

**QUESTION:
WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT OR PICTURE HEAVEN,
WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

One of the most interesting aspects of the Bible is that it tells us of things that are to come for our world. Both the Old and New Testaments talk about how history is moving toward a climax, and that God is in control. All the great figures in history--Pharaoh, Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, Churchill, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung--will realize they have been bit actors in a much greater drama produced and directed by God Himself.

Old Testament prophets looked forward to "the Day of the Lord" and to the day when God will set this world right and bring evil to justice. Zechariah said, "He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea" (Zechariah 9:10). These prophecies center on the coming Messiah who would rule the world in righteousness.

After Jesus gave his disciples the great commission to spread the gospel and make disciples in the whole world, He ascended into heaven. The writer of Acts describes the scene like this: "As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!'" (Acts 1:10-11).

Jesus' return to earth that these angels described is called the Second Coming. Many sincere Christ-followers have studied what the scripture says about the end times and disagree as to

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the sequence of events surrounding Jesus' return. *But despite the differing views, one thing is certain: Jesus is coming again, and we can look forward to the indescribable glory and deliverance that will be ours when He comes.*

Extraordinary and momentous events will take place at the second coming of Christ. The resurrection of the believing dead will occur, and believers who are still alive will be changed and "caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Jesus taught that this resurrection includes all people: "Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son, and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment" (John 5:28-29).

This resurrection is not just a spiritual resurrection, it is a resurrection of our bodies. Our resurrected bodies will not be identical to the ones we have now, but they will be closely related to them. We know this because of Jesus' resurrected body (Luke 24:39). The disciples recognized Jesus after his resurrection. They saw the scars in His hands and side. He talked with them and ate with them. But His body was also very different. For example, Jesus appeared to the disciples when they were in a locked room. He didn't knock on a door to be let in, He simply appeared with them. Paul talks a lot about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. He says our resurrected bodies will be as different as a seed is from the flower that it grows into. He said that, "...our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies" (1 Corinthians 15:53).

QUESTION:

WHAT QUESTIONS HAVE YOU HAD ABOUT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST? HAVE YOU FOUND RESOLUTION TO THOSE QUESTIONS? EXPLAIN.

The scriptures affirm the conscious existence of both the unbeliever and the believer after death and before their resurrection, but give few details. Death is frequently described in the Bible as sleep. The dead are 'asleep' as far as the world is concerned. This in no way implies that they are asleep or unconscious to the other world or that their spirits are totally unconscious. Believers who die are immediately "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). However, Jesus told a story of an unrighteous rich man who died and experienced conscious suffering and punishment (Luke 16:19-31).

The scriptures that talk about what happens to a person after they die give no evidence of purgatory, a place of waiting after death. A person dies either as one who has been redeemed or as one who is under judgement. After death, there is no passing over from one condition to the other. Final judgement or redemption simply settles what has already begun at the time of death. "...each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

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The purpose of this judgment will not be to determine the quality of an individual's character but rather to disclose his character and to assign him to the eternal place corresponding to his trust or lack of trust in God. "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in Him (Jesus). But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

The final destiny of each person is either eternity with God or eternity separated from God.

The Bible speaks of an eternity separated from God as 'hell'. C. S. Lewis described hell as "nothing but yourself for all eternity!" Hell is utter aloneness. While it may seem harsh to think that a loving God would ever condemn someone to everlasting hell, we must also remember that God in His love, has done everything necessary to redeem humankind. His justice requires that He punish sin, but His love provides salvation freely for all who accept it. God does not force Himself on anyone, and He doesn't send anyone to hell. Those who are separated from God are there because they refused or ignored God's love. Sadly, they are solely responsible for their condition.

QUESTION:

DO YOU WRESTLE WITH THE IDEA OF HEAVEN AND HELL? HOW HAVE YOU COME TO A RESOLUTION ABOUT THEM?

The final destination of the believer is heaven. Heaven is simply defined as where God is. It is a place of rest (Hebrews 4:9), of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17), of purity (Revelation 21:27), of worship (Revelation 19:1), of fellowship with others (Hebrews 12:23) and of being with God (Revelation 21:3). "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever" (Revelation 21:4).

Heaven will not be some boring experience of strumming a harp on a cloud. It will be the most dynamic, expanding, exhilarating experience conceivable. Our problem now is that, with our finite minds, we cannot imagine it!

QUESTION:

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU STILL HAVE ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL?

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SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

We don't become angels when we die. Angels are created beings who serve God and worship Him in the spiritual realm. When we die in Christ, our soul is immediately in the presence of God in Heaven. At Christ's second coming when our bodies are resurrected, we will become an eternal, perfected version of ourselves with a new resurrected body like Christ's.

We reject the teaching of reincarnation. We must make good choices with the one life we have and urge others not to count on some later incarnation to work out their problems.

Knowing that our eternity is infinitely longer and more significant than our 70 or so years on earth, we live our lives here so that they take into account this eternal perspective. We choose our activities and priorities based on what pleases God, recognizing that expressing our love for Him through obedience is more important than any other consideration.

Because the message of the Gospel brings eternal life, we are motivated to tell others about God's love for them through Jesus Christ. As we relate to people throughout life, we see them as 'eternal beings' who matter to God and deserve to be treated lovingly.

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We believe that every Christian should live for Christ and not for himself. By obedience to the Word of God and daily yielding to the Holy Spirit, every believer should mature and pursue spiritual transformation to the image of Christ.

Tom has a problem. About a year ago he became a Christ-follower, and he sincerely wants to live a life that honors Jesus, but He continually struggles with lustful thoughts. He remembers what Jesus taught, that anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28). He genuinely wants to live a life that is pleasing to God, but he constantly falls short.

Tom's struggle with sin is not uncommon. In fact, even the Apostle Paul wrote about how he struggled with sin in Romans 7:14-25. He said, "I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway...In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin."

You might be thinking, "If even the Apostle Paul struggled with sin, how can we 'mere mortals' hope to ever get this right?" The key is in the phrase "by obedience to the Word of God and daily yielding to the Holy Spirit."

QUESTION:

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO OBEY THE WORD OF GOD AND DAILY YIELD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT?

When you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit began to live in you. "Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

And because you have the Holy Spirit living in you, you have been given a new nature. "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

But while it's true that the old is gone and a new life has begun, we still have a sin nature, and sometimes we still sin.

When you chose to put your trust in Jesus for your salvation, you were "made right in God's sight

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by faith” (Romans 5:1a). God adopted you as a member of His forever family. He forgave your sin and placed His Holy Spirit in you. The theological term for that is called justification. God sees you ‘just as if’ you had never sinned, but not because you ‘cleaned up your act’ or worked hard to earn His forgiveness. “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We are justified by faith, and God has forgiven us; but as Christ-followers, we are not content just to be forgiven. The Holy Spirit in us prompts us to live a life that pleases God and demonstrates Christ-like behavior in every area of life. In other words, we want to be more like the One who saved us.

QUESTION:

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO EXHIBIT CHRIST-LIKE BEHAVIOR IN YOUR LIFE? DO YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT TO EXHIBIT THESE BEHAVIORS?

This process of becoming more like Jesus is called sanctification. Sanctification is the process of God working in our lives to make us more and more free from sin and more and more like Christ in our actual lives. While justification happens in our lives once for all time and is entirely a work of God, sanctification is a continual work of God throughout our lives in which we cooperate with God to grow in our faith.

The Christian life is more than just being good. In fact many people, even people who don’t believe in Jesus, believe it is important to live a moral life. Jesus promised us that we would experience life in Him that is “rich and satisfying” (John 10:10). That’s a life filled with the fruit of His Spirit--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. But we need to remember that it is the Spirit that produces His fruit in us. We don’t get it by trying harder or through mere sin avoidance.

What distinguishes Christ-followers is the understanding that we cannot live up to God’s standards on our own power. It is only because God graciously works in and through our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit that we can ever hope to live lives that honor God.

The only way we can experience the full and abundant life that Jesus promised is by obeying His Word and submitting to the Holy Spirit moment by moment, every day. *It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to resist sin and be like Jesus as we live out our lives.*

QUESTION:

WHAT EVIDENCE HAVE YOU SEEN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKING IN YOUR LIFE?

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“The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions” (Galatians 5:17).

“How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?” (Galatians 3:3).

The Apostle Paul talks about his own spiritual development process when he says, “I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us” (Philippians 3:12-14).

Paul realized that even though he was a mature Christ-follower, he had not arrived. He had more to learn. He was a work ‘in process’. Two times Paul says, “I press on” toward the goal of becoming more Christlike. Pastor and author Andy Stanley says, “There’s a great deal of energy behind those words (press on). The quest for spiritual maturity was not a passive or casual endeavor for Paul. He makes spiritual formation sound more like an athletic event than a Bible study.”

QUESTION:

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES A SPIRITUALLY MATURE FOLLOWER OF JESUS?

The quest for spiritual maturity is a lifelong endeavor. It’s dynamic and intentional. Our daily lives must be yielded to the Holy Spirit in a moment-by-moment surrender. It’s not about our self-improvement efforts or behavior modification. It’s about believing that God is who He says He is and that He will do what He says He will do. Becoming more Christlike means letting Christ live His life through you. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit...When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love” (John 15:5, 10).

God does not expect or demand perfection from us. He asks us to allow His Holy Spirit help us progressively become more and more like Christ...to press on. “We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin” (Romans 6:6-7).

We have been saved by grace and every day we live in that same loving, forgiving grace.

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QUESTION:

HOW DO YOU PURSUE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION IN YOUR LIFE?

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

As saved people, we are continually striving to be more like the One who saved us. We are not content just to be forgiven, we want to demonstrate Christ-like behavior in every area of life. We will never give up the fight to resist sin and be like Him in everything we say and do.

The Christian life is more than just “being good”—we need the Holy Spirit to bear His fruit in us. Therefore, our daily lives must be yielded to the Spirit in a moment-by-moment surrender or our self-improvement efforts will be useless.

Because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we will listen for His prompting, anticipating that He wants to guide us toward God’s best for us. If we are open to His leading and follow His ‘whispers’, we will experience the abundant life Jesus promises.

WEEK 9

We believe the church is the body of Christ, of which Jesus Christ is the head. The members of the church are those who have trusted by faith the finished work of Christ. The purpose of the church is to glorify God by loving Him and making Him known to a lost world.

Google the definition of the word “church” and your search will yield this: “a building used for public Christian worship.” But the church is far more than a building or an organization. It is first and foremost an organism. The Church is an organism because it is the living body of Christ, made up of all people everywhere who are His followers.

The church is both local and universal. There is one, true, universal Church (that’s ‘Church’ with a capital ‘C’) which is made up of all those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he told them, “All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). While the universal Church includes all believers, the local expression of the church (that’s ‘church’ with a small ‘c’) is found wherever Jesus-followers gather in His name. Cross Point is a local church, and its members are a part of the universal Church.

QUESTION:
WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF BELIEVERS?

The church is also both visible and invisible. The universal Church as the fellowship of all genuine believers, is invisible because we cannot see the spiritual condition of people’s hearts. On the other hand, the visible church is the church as Christians on earth see it. We can see those who outwardly attend a local church, and we can see the outward evidence of the inward change Jesus has made in a person’s life, but we cannot actually see into people’s hearts and view their spiritual state--only God can do that. Only God knows who are true believers with certainty. So the invisible church is the church as God sees it, and the visible church is the church as Christ-followers see it.

Visible and invisible, universal and local, Jesus is the one who is building the church by calling people to Himself. Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).

WEEK 9

The writers of scripture use many different metaphors to describe the church. It is sometimes described as a gathering of a family, which should remind us to increasingly love one another. Another metaphor in scripture describes the church as the bride of Christ, which should encourage us to strive for greater purity and holiness and also greater love for Christ. One of the more familiar metaphors refers to the church as the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul says that Jesus is the head and the rest of the church is the body. He says that the church is alive and is “growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Just like with your own body, every part of the body of Christ is important and plays a significant role. “The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you.’ The head can’t say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you’...All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:21-22, 27).

So whether you are an eye, a hand, a foot or a kidney, every part of the body is strategic and necessary for the whole body to function well. That’s why it is so important for each member of the body to learn about and develop their spiritual gifts so that everyone can participate and serve in some aspect of the church based on their passion and giftedness. “As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Ephesians 4:16).

QUESTION:

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE? HOW HAVE YOU USED THOSE GIFTS IN THE CHURCH?

QUESTION:

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN VARIOUS SPIRITUAL GIFTS WORK TOGETHER INSIDE THE CHURCH?

The writer of Hebrews talks about the importance of the Church gathering together: “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25). Wherever God’s people meet regularly in obedience to this command, there is the local church.

The Scripture commands believers to gather together to devote themselves to worship, prayer, the teaching of the Word, the observance of baptism and communion as the sacramental ordinances established by Jesus Christ, fellowship, service to the body through the development and use of talents and gifts, and outreach to the world.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Every gathering of believers is a gathering of the Church which means that every Group is in fact the Church meeting together in its smallest unit. Group leaders function as shepherds of their “flock.” All leaders are connected to one another through the Groups infrastructure, and ultimately, the Elders can provide care for the entire church through those leaders.

QUESTION: WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN SHOW CARE FOR OTHERS IN THE CHURCH?

Cross Point is a non-denominational church. While some churches have a membership where participants may choose to join, at Cross Point you are identified as a member by your engagement in the church. If you are a follower of Jesus, have been baptized, attend regularly, are a part of a Group, use your spiritual gift and serve, and give a percentage of your income to help further the mission of Cross Point, then you are recognized as a member.

QUESTION: WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN ENGAGE WITH CROSS POINT?

Disunity hurts the body of Christ and His cause. We guard our unity and diligently seek to honestly confront and work through differences in God-honoring ways that both respect the individual (who is made in God’s image) and preserve the oneness we are called to live out in Christ. Under the watchcare of Elders and other supportive leadership, its members are to work together in love and unity, intent on the one ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ and helping others find and follow Jesus.

THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES WERE USED IN THE CREATION OF THIS STUDY:

- Bible Doctrine. Copyright 1999. Wayne Grudem. Zondervan Publishing.
- Know What You Believe. Copyright 2008. Paul E. Little. InterVarsity Press.
- What We Believe. Copyright 2010. Heartland Community Church, Rockford IL.
- Deep and Wide. Copyright 2012. Andy Stanley. Zondervan Publishing.
- All scripture quotations are from The New Living Translation
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