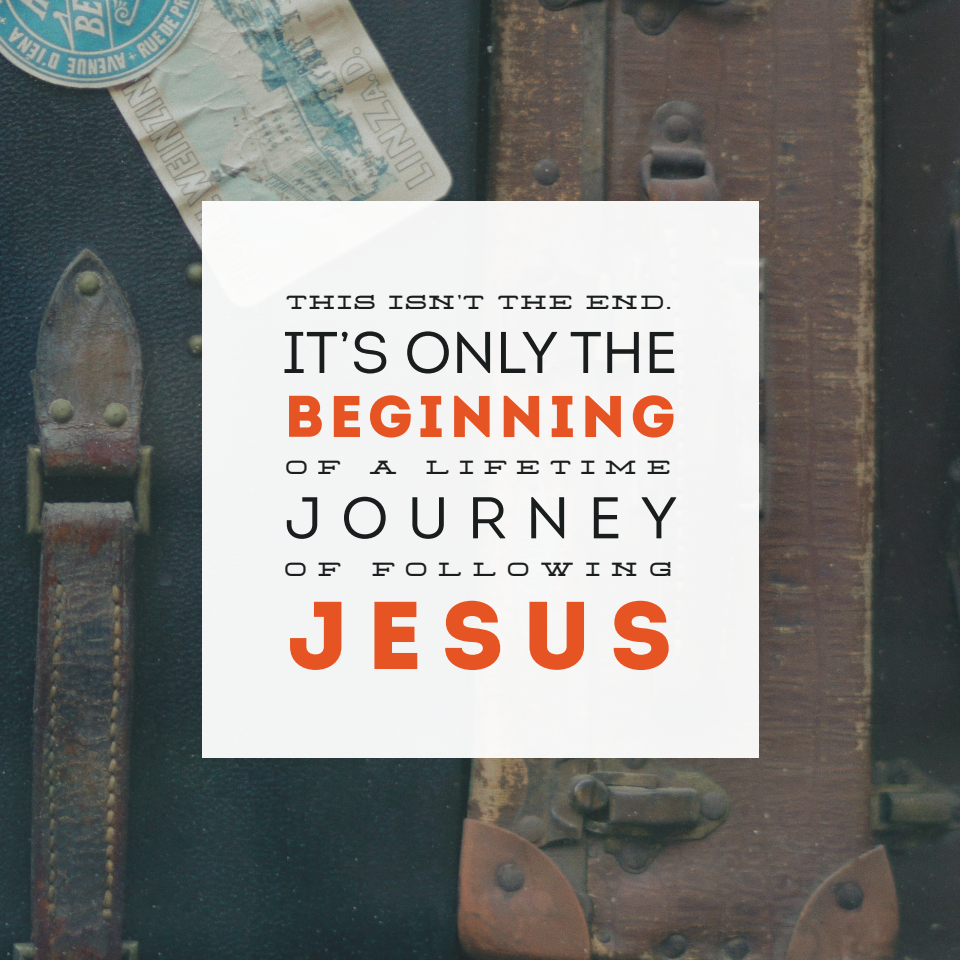


A person wearing blue jeans and white sneakers is walking on a large, weathered log in a forest. The ground is covered with dry leaves and ferns. The background is a blurred forest scene.

YOUR FIRST WEEK





THIS ISN'T THE END.

IT'S ONLY THE

BEGINNING

OF A LIFETIME

JOURNEY

OF FOLLOWING

JESUS



YOUR FIRST WEEK AS A DISCIPLE

As you start this journey of following Jesus, we want to help you discover what the first steps of faith should look like. We can't possibly cover every aspect of life in a single booklet, but we've created ***Your First Week as a Disciple*** to point you in the right direction.

Each day, you'll read a brief entry that is designed to help you on the path of discipleship. At the conclusion of each entry, there is a Bible reading. To help you navigate the pages of Scripture, the page number listed corresponds to the Bible you were given. There is also a suggested prayer. The words aren't magical, nor are they a special formula for blessing; but these words are suggested to help you discover what it means to enter into an ongoing conversation with God, your heavenly Father.

DAY 1

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?



There are a lot of words and metaphors to describe how you're probably feeling right now. *The light bulb went on. Everything finally clicked. I feel like a weight has been lifted.* Each metaphor helps explain a piece of what is happening in your life. The Bible uses several terms as well, but one is especially helpful: you have been born again.

That's a pretty good way of describing what has taken place. You have been given a clean slate, a fresh start, and a brand new opportunity. Your past is in the past, and it's almost like you have been given a second chance.

God has given you the greatest gift in the world: you have been forgiven of sin and been given eternal life in Jesus.

Even though the gift of being born again is free (you can't possibly earn it), it is very, very costly. The reason Jesus is so central to this story – to your story – is because He took your place. Every person's lifetime of sin deserves God's judgment. God hates sin so much because sin destroys what God loves: **you**. Out of Jesus' incredible love for you, He took the judgment that your sin deserved. You can be declared "not guilty" because of Jesus. The Bible says:

ROMANS 5:8 (page 1130)

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

So when we come face-to-face with the loving sacrifice of Jesus, we need to repent of our sin. Repenting just means you turn around 180° and head in the opposite direction of where you were going. It

means to leave behind the old way of doing things to embrace Jesus and follow His way.

So, to be born again means that you understand what Jesus did for you, and you receive Him into your life by faith. You will never be the same – and that’s a good thing.

READ

EPHESIANS 2:1-5 (on page 1174 in the Bible you received)

PRAY

“God, thank You for Jesus. With all the faith that I have, I am beginning to understand just how much You love me. Teach me how to follow You from this day forward.”





DAY 2

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Yesterday, everything clicked for you, and in that moment you knew you needed to do something in response. But what happens now? Do you just return to life as usual or does something need to change? To answer that, there's another word that the Bible uses to describe what happened in your life: you are now a **disciple** of Jesus. We don't hear that word too often, so what does that even mean? In the general sense of the word, to be a disciple is similar to being a student who follows a teacher or leader very closely. But to be more specific, here's a definition of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus:

A disciple is someone who is daily following Jesus and compelling others to do the same.

This isn't just about you making a momentary decision; it's about you becoming a disciple of Jesus. You might be thinking "I didn't know what I was signing up for!" But don't worry, because we only need to focus on the day in front of us. When Jesus was talking to His original 12 disciples, He said to them, "Follow me." Look at how one passage in the Bible captures this moment:

MATTHEW 9:9 (page 973)

"As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow Me," He told him, and Matthew got up and followed him."

Matthew doesn't say, "Hey where are we going? Is it going to be dangerous? Should I bring my jacket?" Isn't that amazing? Any of us would probably have a million questions in that moment. But the Bible says, "Matthew got up and followed Him." He had faith to follow Jesus. Even though Matthew didn't know what would happen next, he knew Jesus did know, and his faith in Jesus propelled him to follow.

What would that look like in your life? Could we follow the format of **Matthew 9:9** and fill in the blanks with your story?

On _____ Jesus said to
this day

_____ "Follow Me".
your name

And so, _____
your name

got up and followed Jesus.

You have also heard Jesus tell you, "Follow me." Don't look back. Keep following Him.

READ **EPHESIANS 2:6-10** (page 1174)

PRAY "God, increase my faith in You so that I won't worry about what the future holds. Guide me in this life so that I can follow You as Your disciple. Help me to trust Jesus more and more every day. Amen."





DAY 3

DIGGING A WELL

Some people look at Christianity as a checklist of what to do and what not to do. They think that Christianity is just like every other world religion, except Christians believe that their checklist is superior.

While there definitely is something to be said about how we should live as disciples of Jesus (more on that later), the truth is that we aren't just following a list; we're following a Person: Jesus. This is exactly why Christianity is so unlike every other world religion: we're not following a **what**, we are following a **Who**. And that makes a huge difference. We're not adhering to a code of conduct that makes us *holier*

than they. We are seeking to know God personally through Jesus.

Being a disciple is a lot like digging a well. When you dig a well, you understand that you can't satisfy your own thirst; you need to access a water source. But if you're in a desert, you can't sit back and say, "I'm going to let the water come to me." If you do that, you'll die of thirst! Instead, if you're stuck in a desert and you're thirsty, you grab a shovel and you start digging.

This world feels an awful lot like a desert sometimes. We get bombarded with messages that if we buy this or go on that vacation we'll finally be satisfied. We

hear empty promises from people that this experience or that relationship will make us complete. And when we try all of these things, we keep waking up parched with no hope of satisfying that thirst. But there's good news: there is a water source – and it's very close! ***When we know God personally through faith in Jesus, we discover that He is the only source of water that will satisfy.*** Jesus used this metaphor when He said:

JOHN 7:37-38 (page 1071)

“On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.””

How do we do that? How can we come to Him if Jesus isn't physically living on this earth? We come to Him by reading His Word, the Bible. We must do this daily so that we develop a taste for the Living Water that Jesus promises. When we do that, the offers that the world throws our way won't even be able to touch us. Or to use another word picture, once you've tasted filet mignon, that fast-food hamburger just doesn't look very appealing anymore.

READ JOHN 4:4-15 (page 1065-1066)

PRAY “God, help me when I'm reading the Bible. I want to understand more of what I'm reading each day, because I want to discover more of who You are. Make things clear to me that used to be confusing. Reveal Yourself to me through the Bible. Amen.”





DAY 4

A NEW WAY OF LIFE

Picture two heavyweight boxers – big, huge Muhammad Ali types. One fighter is in blue trunks, the other in red. The big title bout is weeks away, but the fighter-in-red is training furiously. He's eating right, sleeping right, and training right. Everything he does is aimed at being ready for the fight. The fighter-in-blue, on the other hand, isn't taking it as seriously. "I'm a professional," he says, "I'll be ready for the fight when the time comes." As a result, he doesn't eat well, he stays up all hours of the night, and his training is sporadic at best.

On the day of their match, which fighter will be ready? It's a no-brainer, right?

The fighter-in-red will easily knock the fighter-in-blue right out. Why? Because the fighter-in-red hates defeat and wants to win. The fighter-in-blue is lazy and thinks he can win without training.

Look at this verse from

2 TIMOTHY 3:16 (page 1199):

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and **training in righteousness.**"*

Why should we read the Bible? Just to fill up our heads with more information? So we can impress people with how much of it we know? No! ***The Bible helps to train us in the way we should live.*** God's

Word teaches us what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus. But what are we training for? There's a battle going on in our lives: it's called temptation. Picture those two heavyweight fighters again, only this time, imagine that they are fighting within you. There's the fighter-in-blue, who represents the Old Way - your life before Jesus. Then there's the fighter-in-red, and he represents the New Way of life that Jesus brings. When temptation comes (and it will), which fighter will win that battle? Will you slip back into old patterns, thoughts, and decisions? Or will you overcome and say, "No" to sin? Will you choose to live by the power of God's Spirit, and not your own power?

You have a choice: whichever fighter you train is the fighter that will be ready for the title bout of temptation. If you keep feeding the same old desires of the fighter-in-blue, and you give him whatever he wants, you won't be ready when temptation comes. But if you start to train the fighter-in-red, and feed the new desires that come from Jesus, you'll be ready! Here's the good news: you're not fighting alone. Jesus is not just in your corner, he's fighting off the old right there with you, because he wants to totally defeat the sin that has had your number for years. He's given you His Spirit and He wants to show you the joy and freedom that comes from living life a new way - His way. You'll never look back.

READ **ROMANS 7:15-25** (page 1132)

PRAY "Lord, I'm not strong enough to conquer temptation in my own strength. But for the first time in my life, I can honestly say that I don't want my old way. I want to say, 'No' to the things that have had my number for years. Jesus, give me the strength I need each day to choose righteousness as I follow You. Amen."





DAYS

FORGIVENESS AND FREEDOM

Before you think that being a disciple of Jesus means being perfectly sinless, let's be clear: we all mess up. No one is perfect. Someone has wisely said that being a disciple isn't about being sinless, but a disciple will sin less. That's a really important distinction! But what happens when you mess up and blow it? Do you have to go back to step one?

The worst thing you and I can do when we sin is to believe any (or all) of the following lies that may come our way: *God doesn't love you. How could God love you when you continually blow it? You call yourself a Christian? If you were really a Christian, you wouldn't have said that. You'll always*

be an addict. You'll always be a screw-up, good-for-nothing. When we hear these lies (which don't come from God), it's helpful to know and remember what the Bible says:

ROMANS 8:1-2 (page 1132)

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."

GALATIANS 5:1 (page 1171)

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Let's make a few observations based on these verses: First, there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus. If you're a disciple, the eternal punishment for sin has been lifted from you because of Jesus (think back to Day 1). Now that you are in Christ through faith, God loves you relentlessly and unconditionally; nothing can ever change that. Second, we have been set free. Set free from what? We have been freed from the chains of sin and death; that's why the Galatians passage uses the metaphor of slavery. It was almost as if we were trapped in sin before Jesus, but that's not the case any more. Third, we are free to stand firm as a disciple. That means, even if we make


a sinful choice, we can remind ourselves that we are disciples of Jesus – and that means we don't have to make that same sinful choice again. *We are forgiven to be free: free to choose righteousness over sin every time.*

So remember, even when we sin, the grace and forgiveness that removed us from an eternity of separation from God are the same grace and forgiveness that we need each day as a disciple. We have been declared “forgiven” and “free” – which means that any bumps in the road should teach us just how precious it is to experience God's grace.

READ **ROMANS 6:1-14** (page 1131)

PRAY “Heavenly Father, I never want to take advantage of Your endless grace. Since I am learning what it really means to be forgiven, I ask that You will help me understand the freedom I have in Jesus to choose your path. When I sin, I pray that You will help me see the error of my ways quickly so that I won't dwell there. Remind me that I am forgiven and free. Amen.”



A person wearing a blue jacket is holding an open book. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a couch or chair.

DAY 6

A NEW KIND OF RELATIONSHIP

Being a disciple of Jesus means that He changes and transforms everything – and I mean **everything**. He transforms the way we think, the way we talk, and the way we treat people. He transforms our desires, our decision-making, and even how we spend our time. But one of the clearest ways to see this transformation is in our relationships.

Once you experience this life-transforming love from God through Jesus, it's pretty natural that you will start to love people better than before. Since you are flooded with God's love, it just flows out to people you care about: your spouse, your kids, your friends – whoever.

And that doesn't surprise us. But one of the distinctives of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus is that He calls us to love people regardless of whether we can benefit from it. Look at Jesus' words:

LUKE 6:32-33 (page 1033)

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that."

What's Jesus saying here? If we only love people who love us back, that doesn't indicate any life transformation. He essentially says, "Anybody can do that."

And He's right. But to be a follower of Jesus means a different kind of love altogether: a love that is unconditional; a love that is pure; a love that is not driven by kickbacks or return of investment; a love that is like God's love. As Jesus' disciples, we want to love everyone the way He loves. In fact, Jesus said that love would be the thing that identifies us as belonging to Him:

JOHN 13:34-35 (page 1080)


"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This is how the world will know you are a follower of Jesus: if you love others like He does! You might be thinking, *That's impossible!* You're right: loving people like Jesus (let alone people who are difficult to love) is impossible on your own. But Jesus Himself will fill you with His divine, limitless love so that you can love people like He does. It's not something you can do on your own; but it is something that reflects our identity as disciples of Jesus.

READ ROMANS 12:9-21 (page 1137-1138)

PRAY "God, there's no way I can love people like I should without you in my life. Help me to love more like You every day. Show me one person in my life right now that I don't love like you do – and give me the strength to love them that way. Amen."





DAY 7

CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY

We weren't designed to go through life alone. Even from the beginning of humanity, in the midst of God's perfect creation, God said this: *"It is not good for the man to be alone"* (**Genesis 2:18**, page 3). In other words, we were designed for community. But this goes beyond getting married, having good friendships, or being a good citizen. As a disciple of Jesus, that means ***we need a unique kind of community that we know as the church.***

When you hear the word **church** you might think of an old building with a steeple. Or you might think of a priest saying things you don't really understand. But the word **church** actually means

people. God designed the church to function like a family that is united around one thing: faith in Jesus Christ. Or if we use the metaphor of a body, Jesus is the Head and all of us are members of His body. The Bible says it this way:

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27 (page 1152)

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

This verse says, *"Now you are the body."* This is a present-tense reality. "And each one of you is a part of it." That means we are all valuable to this body right now. *Well, as a part of this body, what responsibility do I have? If I'm valuable,*

and if I'm needed, what am I needed for?

HEBREWS 10:24-25 (page 1211)

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

This passage says we should be encouraging each other to live a life that honors Jesus. And to do this, we should make sure that we gather and meet together for that very purpose. We need to be in each other's lives, connected to the community of believers, so that we can support one another as we walk

through life as disciples. It's not easy, and we were never intended to do it alone; that's why we need to be connected to this community called the church.

So don't think of church attendance as another box to check on your list. We don't show up on Sundays to make God happy (or worse, to get God off our back). We don't attend a church service because "it's tradition" or out of obligation. We stay connected to the local church to worship God together, to study the Word of God together, and to go through life together as disciples. This was God's plan for our continual growth in the faith, and there is no plan B.

READ

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27 (page 1151-1152)

PRAY

"God, I don't want to stay on the sidelines or hide in the shadows of this community of faith. Give me the boldness to get connected to this community so that I will discover what You want to do in my life and in the life of this local church. Surround me with wise people who love You and will help me to walk as a disciple. Amen."





DISCIPLESHIP **PATHWAY**

1. FOUNDATIONS

Foundations is a class designed to help you understand what it means to follow Jesus. You will learn about your identity in Christ, what is needed for growing in your faith and baptism. This is also a great class for those who desire to strengthen their understanding of the foundations of our faith.

2. TEACHINGS

In Teachings, you will learn about being a disciple who loves God, loves the church, and loves the world. We believe God has called those who attend The Chapel to embody this way of living.

3. MY CIRCLE

MyCircle is a class designed to teach you what it means to live as a disciple of Christ. You will learn about God's plan for the world and how to pray and care for your neighbors. You will also be equipped to have spiritual conversations and to share the gospel with others.

4. DEVELOPMENT

All of God's people are called to Christian maturity. This is where we take ownership of our spiritual formation and are equipped to serve Christ in the church and in the world.

RESPONSE CARD

NAME _____ **DATE** _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

ARE YOU NEW TO THE CHAPEL?

☐ yes ☐ no

GENDER

☐ male ☐ female

AGE

☐ 17 or younger ☐ 18-29 ☐ 30-54 ☐ 55 & up

MARITAL STATUS

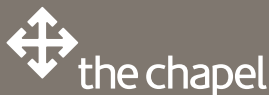
☐ married ☐ divorced ☐ single ☐ widow/widower

I CAME HERE TODAY BECAUSE I...

☐ became a follower of Christ ☐ need prayer

☐ recommitted my life to Christ ☐ other _____

ON MISSION TO ENSURE
THAT EVERY MAN, WOMAN
AND CHILD HAVE **REPEATED**
OPPORTUNITIES TO **HEAR AND SEE**
THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST



CHEEKTOWAGA

Sundays at 9 & 11am
200 Thruway Plaza Drive
Cheektowaga, NY 14225 | 716.393.4600

CROSSPOINT

Sundays at 9 & 11am
500 CrossPoint Parkway
Getzville, NY 14068 | 716.631.2636

LOCKPORT

Sundays at 9 & 11am
25 Walnut Street
Lockport, NY 14094 | 716.514.4050

NIAGARA FALLS

Sundays at 10am
Regal Cinemas • 720 Builders Way
Niagara Falls, NY 14304 | 716.631.2636