
What You Need to Know About

Repentance & Baptism

Life Hope & Truth

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Introduction: *Why You Need to Know About Repentance and Baptism*

God hates sin. It is the opposite of how He thinks and acts; it causes suffering and death. Yet we all sin. And we live in a world that ignores sin, excuses sin, even celebrates sin. There is an evil enemy who is very successful at deceiving us into thinking sin isn't so bad.

But every once in a while, we might get a glimpse of something we have done, and it isn't pretty. We may even begin to see that what we are, and how we think, is tainted with selfishness and is drawn toward things we know are not right. Evil lurks in the recesses of our minds, and as hard as we might try, we can't get rid of wrong thoughts. Too often such thoughts grow into wrong actions—actions that we feel guilty about and ashamed of.

If God hates sin, does He hate us when we sin? No, our merciful God loves us so much He is willing to forgive all our sins upon repentance!

He has a step-by-step plan to rescue us from sin and guilt, and to give us a fresh start. He wants to free us from bondage to sin and guilt and give each of us a new life as a child of God!

What does He want us to do when we begin to recognize our sins? The apostle Peter answered this vital question in Acts 2:38:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Repent. Be baptized. These are important biblical topics and vital steps in God's plan to save us.

This study guide is dedicated to helping you understand repentance and baptism. Here's what God wants you to know—and do!

Chapter 1: What Is Repentance?

Repentance is a major theme of the Bible and a requirement for sinful humans to approach the holy God. But what does *repent* mean?

Repentance involves a complete change of thought, attitude and action. It's like making a U-turn in life.

What does repentance mean?

Repentance is a change of heart and change of direction. It involves a determination to stop sinning and not to sin in the future.

Definition of repentance

The Greek word translated “repentance” in the New Testament means “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness” (J.P. Louw and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 1988).

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words points out that the Greek literally means “to perceive afterwards.”

Considering these definitions, what is repentance? It is looking at something that you did in the past, recognizing that it was sinful—that it broke God’s good and beneficial laws—and concluding you need to change for the better.

The initial steps of repentance

Since it is not natural for us to desire to make the changes necessary to obey God (Romans 8:7), He must lead us to understand the need for repentance (Romans 2:4), which is the starting point of a commitment to a new way of living and to the transformation of the human heart and mind from carnal to spiritual (Acts 3:19; Romans 12:2).

Some have been led to repentance by a significant emotional event called being “cut to the heart” in Acts 2:37. (See our online article “[Repentance: Being Cut to the Heart](#).”) Others have been smitten by a [guilty conscience](#) or brought to some other [turning point](#) in life.

The Bible shows that initial repentance is a significant, personal, life-changing decision that leads to baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-39).

Repentance requires that we understand what sin is—the breaking of God’s law (1 John 3:4). John explains why keeping the commandments is important: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). God’s laws are beneficial, but we all have broken them (Romans 3:23). Sinning automatically brings curses, and ultimately, it brings eternal death (Romans 6:23).

True repentance is characterized by an understanding of the seriousness of sin (Ephesians 2:1-3), a deep desire to be forgiven (Psalm 32:1-5) and a determined commitment to change behavior and thoughts in order to stop sinning (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:19-20).

We’ll study more about what the Bible says about sin in the next chapter.

Godly sorrow leads to repentance

The apostle Paul emphasized that “godly sorrow” produces genuine repentance, which results in permanent changes that ultimately lead a person toward salvation, in contrast to “the sorrow of the world,” which does not result in permanent change and leads to death. “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Verse 11 highlights the diligent effort and vehement desire to change, which godly sorrow produces. “For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”

Study the meaning of this important passage further in our online article “[Godly Sorrow](#).”

Repent and believe the gospel

Jesus’ gospel message includes a call to repentance. As Mark recorded, “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14-15).

Jesus was calling for a repentance that leads to a change in direction—turning from the natural pursuit of sinful human values to obedience and seeking the Kingdom of God. Jesus used current events of His time to emphasize that a person’s life is futile and random until he or she comes to repentance and begins to pursue the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:1-5).

After His death and resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples to teach about His sacrifice and preach “repentance and remission of sins . . . in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47; see also Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus was willing to be beaten and die a horrible death to pay the penalty for our sins. That awesome sacrifice reinforces the seriousness of sin and the thankfulness we need to show to our merciful God.

Examples of true repentance in the Bible

One of the most memorable and detailed examples of repentance in the Bible is David’s repentance after his sin with Bathsheba and his attempted cover-up that led to the murder of her husband Uriah.

The story is told in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, but the details of David’s repentance are found in Psalm 51.

“To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.

“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

“For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (Psalm 51:1-3).

Read the rest of Psalm 51 for further details of his prayers of repentance.

Other examples of repentance in the Bible include Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9 and Peter’s sorrow after denying Jesus three times (Mark 14:66-72).

Repentance is an ongoing frame of mind

What is repentance? Is it just a single decision that leads to baptism? No, it also must be an ongoing frame of mind, recognizing that overcoming sin is a lifetime effort. Whenever we fall short of full obedience, we need to repent and seek forgiveness.

In Colossians 3:1-10 Paul calls on those who, through repentance, have been baptized and have received the Holy Spirit to “put to death” the sinful ways of the “old man” and to “put on the new man.”

In Romans 7:13-25 he vividly describes our battle to overcome our nature and inclination to sin—and explains that our only hope is through Jesus Christ, by whom we can be forgiven (verses 24-25). After our initial repentance and baptism, we will have an ongoing need to repent and seek forgiveness (1 John 1:8-10).

God wants all to come to repentance

Ultimately, it is God’s plan that everyone have the opportunity to receive the gift of salvation, which begins with the experience of personal repentance. As Peter wrote, God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Chapter 2: What Is Sin?

Sin is generally thought of as something bad. But exactly what is sin? How does the Bible define it? What is the Bible’s teaching about sin?

What is sin according to the Bible?

The biblical definition of sin is found in 1 John 3:4: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (King James Version). To sin is to transgress, or break, the law of God.

The Bible says a lot about sin. It tells us that all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and that sin leads to death (Romans 6:23).

In order to avoid sin, it’s essential we know exactly what sin is. So how does the Bible define sin?

The clearest definition of sin that we find in the Bible is 1 John 3:4: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (King James Version). Let’s examine this scripture to discover what it is telling us about sin. To understand it, we can consider the range of meanings of the Greek words John used.

What is the meaning of the Greek word for sin?

The Greek word John used for sin is *hamartia*.

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon notes that this word at its root meant “a failing to hit the mark,” and in the New Testament it is always used in an ethical sense. *Thayer’s* defines the use of *hamartia* in 1 John 3:4 as “that which is done wrong, committed or resultant sin, an offence, a violation of the divine law in thought or in act.” Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates defines it as “missing the true goal and scope of life” (*The Complete Word Study New Testament*, p. 884).

Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words notes that *hamartia* and related words “incorporate the full range

of meaning of all three basic Hebrew words [for sin], *hata*, *pesa*, and *awon*. Like them, *hamartia* assumes a divine standard or norm and portrays humanity as missing the mark. Yet sin is also seen in the NT as rebellion and as conscious deviation from known right . . .

“Sin is not only missing God’s mark; it is an inner reality, a warp in human nature, and a malignant power that holds each individual in an unbreakable grip” (p. 568).

Thankfully, God has a plan to set us free from this slavery to sin (Romans 6:1-14).

So to sin can be to miss the goal or target—or even to rebel, reject or ignore God’s standards. It is to fall short of what God expects of us. We can think of sin as the opposite of righteousness. Righteousness is living within God’s just and right standards, while sin is failing to live by those standards.

What is the meaning of transgression?

The Greek word for transgression in 1 John 3:4 is *anomia*, which is a combination of *a*, meaning without or against, and *nomos*, meaning law. So the literal meaning of *anomia* is *without law* or *against law*. The New King James Version translates this word as “lawlessness” (to live or conduct oneself as if there is no law).

So the apostle John defined sin as transgression of the law (or lawlessness, law-breaking). Essentially, sin is making a decision—or living a lifestyle—that violates the law of God.

This basic definition of sin as being a transgression of the law is also found in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language, and the Hebrew words for transgression and transgress reveal additional understanding of sin. The Hebrew word for transgress is *abar*, meaning to “cross over.” It can also mean to “turn away” (*Strong’s*

Exhaustive Concordance, #5674). The Hebrew word for transgression is *pasha*, which means rebellion or revolt or sin (*Strong’s*, #6588).

Consider 2 Chronicles 24:20: “The Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them, ‘Thus says God: “Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper?”’”

A very encouraging scripture states: “Blessed is he whose transgression [rebellion, sin] is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1). The Hebrew word for sin here is *chataah*, which means an offense (*Strong’s*, #2401). So when our transgressions and sins are forgiven, that means our rebellion and revolt against God is removed from us.

What law defines sin?

The law we break when we sin is the law of God found in the Bible. So, rephrased, 1 John 3:4 states that sin is violating the law of God. The primary laws God gave to guide human conduct are the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20).

We can transgress those laws in two ways:

- **We can live a general lifestyle of lawlessness.**
This means we live a self-willed way of life without any thought or care for the restraints of God’s law. For instance, people who make all their decisions according to their passions or desires are living in a condition of lawlessness.
- **We can transgress a specific commandment.** For instance, God’s law instructs us to “not steal” (Exodus 20:15). If we ignore that law and steal something, we have transgressed the law—and sinned.

Both the general lifestyle of sin and committing specific acts of sin bring undesirable consequences.

God’s law was given to show mankind the best way to live in harmony with God and others (Luke 10:27). God gave the law as a blessing and intended it to guide mankind into an abundant way of life (John 10:10). He wants all people to have prosperity, peace and joy in their lives.

When we live within the guardrails of God’s 10 Commandments, we free ourselves from all sorts of suffering caused by breaking those commandments.

Jesus and the law

Did Jesus uphold the law of God, or did He do away with the commandments? He answered that question directly in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

“Fulfill” means the opposite of “destroy.” He gave full meaning to the law and summarized it into two overall great commandments. (To go deeper into what Jesus meant when He said He came to *fulfill* the law, read our online article “[Did Jesus Fulfill the Law?](#)”)

When a man asked Him, “Which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus answered, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great

commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:36-39).

These two great commandments are a synopsis of God’s 10 Commandments. The first four commandments state how we are to love God. The last six commandments state how we should treat one another. Breaking any of these commandments is sin.

Blessings for obedience

From the beginning, God established blessings for obedience to His law and penalties for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15). God has designed human life to work best when it is aligned with His law. He envisioned ancient Israel modeling obedience so that other peoples would learn to obey and be blessed.

But ancient Israel sinned—they did not obey God, just as modern nations today do not obey God. The world exists in a state of sin and continues to write a sad, violent history.

A time is coming when Jesus Christ will return to rule the earth and end moral confusion. He will establish God’s law as the law of the world. All people will come to understand the law. They will learn what sin is and what the consequences of lawlessness are. Of course, people will still be people—there will be sin that must be forgiven. But they will be led by a moral and upright government and will experience righteousness, peace and joy.

People everywhere will love the law and the rewards for obeying it. In the future government of Jesus Christ, the prophecy of Jeremiah will be fulfilled: “But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you’” (Jeremiah 7:23).

Other Bible verses that define sin

Though 1 John 3:4 gives the Bible’s most basic and clear definition of sin, there are a number of scriptures that give additional definitions of sin:

- “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).
- “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).
- “All unrighteousness is sin” (1 John 5:17).

These scriptures show that sin is also much broader than just breaking the letter of one of the 10 Commandments. Sin can be making a decision based on unfaithfulness to God and can also be neglecting to do what’s right when we have the opportunity. To learn more about this kind of sin, read our online article “[Sins of Omission: Do They Exist?](#)”

How to be set free from sin

Sin is against God, and it brings the death penalty (Romans 6:23). But God provides a way we can have that penalty removed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).

When we accept Christ’s sacrifice and have our sins washed away through baptism, we then cease being slaves to sin and become slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:17-18). Righteousness is the opposite of lawlessness. It is striving to live within the boundaries of God’s law (Psalm 119:172).

We can experience a great measure of peace and stability by keeping God’s law today. “Moreover by them [the law, testimony, statutes, commandments and judgments] Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:11). “But let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you” (Proverbs 3:1-2).

You need to learn more about God’s law and about how to overcome sin.

Download our free booklets *God’s 10 Commandments: Still Relevant Today* and *Change Your Life!* They will give you a concise, easy-to-read guide to what the Bible teaches on these vital subjects.

Chapter 3: How to Repent

Jesus came preaching a message of repentance. Since all of us have sinned, we all need to repent. But what does it mean to repent? Here’s how to repent.

The topic of [repentance](#) is found throughout the pages of the Bible. When Jesus spoke, He often said that His audience needed to repent. He came not “to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Luke 5:32).

That message is just as much for us today as it was for people living 2,000 years ago. Everyone needs to learn how to repent of sin because God “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). For no one can receive the gift of eternal life without first repenting of sin.

Yet repentance is often misunderstood in the religious world. Many see it as an emotional reaction to guilt, feeling remorseful for our sins, or simply asking God for

forgiveness. True repentance includes these things—but the Bible shows there’s more to it.

True repentance is much more than a momentary emotional reaction; it is actually a lifelong process! Many people see a need to change something in their lives, but what exactly needs to be changed? What must one do to continue to be in a repentant attitude?

Step 1: Recognize that God’s thoughts are higher and better than yours

The first step to true repentance is changing how we think. We need to come to recognize that God’s mind and thoughts are truly higher (and better) than ours.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

We don’t naturally think like this. The apostle Paul identified how human beings typically think: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh” (Romans 8:5).

The human mind does not think as God thinks. The human mind thinks carnally. Paul also wrote that “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). *Enmity* means that we naturally resist and oppose what God’s law tells us to do.

But what does *carnal* mean?

The basic meaning of carnal is being driven by fleshly and worldly motivations—in other words, thinking and

We need to come to recognize that God’s mind and thoughts are truly higher (and better) than ours.

doing *what we want to do* and *what feels good*, without regard to God’s law and guidance.

Jesus Christ identified the kind of carnal

thoughts that come from our minds: “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed *evil thoughts*, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these *evil things* come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:20-23, emphasis added throughout).

Our fleshly, carnal mind produces thoughts and actions that are sinful according to God. The natural “works of the

flesh are . . . adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21).

All these evil things are sin; they break God’s law (1 John 3:4; see the previous chapter).

So, in order to repent and please God, we must first recognize where our thinking and habits are out of line with God’s thoughts and laws. But we can’t do that until we recognize that His thoughts and ways are higher than ours and are *right*.

And we need to recognize that God Himself leads us to this understanding. As Paul wrote, “The goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4).

Step 2: Acknowledge your personal guilt of sin

The second step to true repentance is to humbly acknowledge our personal guilt to God—which means confessing our sins and realizing how far we fall short of God’s thoughts and ways in our lives.

The apostle Peter’s stirring sermon on the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem struck the *conscience* of his audience. Thousands of people were “cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37).

They internally recognized their guilt and openly acknowledged it. Their *guilt* demanded that they find out how to repent and begin changing their lives.

Repentance must go deeper than merely recognizing what is right or wrong or *feeling* bad about our sins. We must admit our personal guilt to God for breaking His holy law. Christian repentance is a godly sorrow that is so deep and profound that it leads us to diligently pursue changing our lives (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

Repentance is an acknowledgement that our entire way of life is at odds with God—and *needs to change*. We must understand that our sins separated us from God and required the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Our desire to be forgiven and obey God from now on must be motivated from the heart.

King David fell victim to the very strong pulls of his carnality. When confronted with his sins, he did not excuse himself. He immediately recognized how offensive his sins were to God and that he had “sinned against the LORD” (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51:4). We must always remember that we repent to God (Acts 20:21)—not to a human being.

David understood what Isaiah wrote later, that “your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins

have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). David understood the severity of his sins and did not want to destroy his relationship with God. He confessed those sins openly and repented bitterly to God (Psalm 51).

We must also go to God directly, acknowledging our sins and asking Him to intervene in our lives and forgive us.

Step 3: Turn from your sinful thoughts and ways

The third step to true repentance is turning away (or giving up) the sins in our life.

The prophet Isaiah stated: “Let the wicked forsake *his way*, and the unrighteous man *his thoughts*; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

No one is immune from sinning: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Even after baptism and conversion, Christians sin and need to repent (1 John 1:8, 10).

The end result of sinning is death—*everlasting death*. The Bible makes this very clear: “For the wages of sin is *death*” (Romans 6:23).

A person who is learning how to repent will begin to obey God by keeping His commandments.

Jesus stated, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5).

Many believe

the consequence of sin is torment in hell, but these verses (and many others) make it clear that death is the ultimate consequence and punishment for sin.

God does not want us to pay this ultimate price. His desire is for each of us to learn how to repent, to be forgiven of our sins and to have the death penalty removed. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9).

Repenting requires that we turn from our sins—both actions and thoughts—and turn to God. We must confess our sins to God and stop sinning. For those who sincerely want to please God, this process requires a lifelong commitment. We make that commitment through water baptism.

Step 4: Seek to live by every word of God

The fourth step to true repentance is changing our lives to bring ourselves into alignment with God. God’s laws define what we must change. We must take God’s instructions seriously. This is what the Bible calls being converted.

Peter said that conversion (changing our lives) is linked to repentance: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

Seeking to change our lives and be in alignment with God’s ways requires humility: “On this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:2). A repentant person will respect God’s Word and seek to live by what it teaches.

When we respect God’s Word, we’ll seek to fulfill Jesus’ words in Matthew 4:4: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

A person who is learning how to repent will begin to obey God by keeping His commandments. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3). The last book of the Bible focuses on those end-time Christians “who keep the commandments of God” (Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 22:14).

God promises to provide us with the determination and strength to face our sins and overcome them without becoming discouraged. This spiritual battle requires more than human determination. Regardless of how long it takes us to succeed in this process, God must be involved. He provides us with the extra strength “both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

To learn more about what it means to be converted and live by God’s words, read our online article “[What Is Conversion?](#)”

Step 5: Continue to seek repentance and rely on Christ’s sacrifice

The fifth step to true repentance is having “faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). We confess our sins to God, and He forgives us because of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. We need to have faith that Christ not only sacrificed Himself for our sins, but also that His sacrifice *does* remove our sins.

Jesus Christ is our Savior. His death paid the penalty for our sins. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Our faith toward Christ, in what He did for us, continues for the rest of our lives. Every time we sin, we must go to God the Father and ask for forgiveness, which is made possible through the sacrifice of our Savior. We must have full faith and confidence that Christ’s sacrifice will be applied to us each time we repent.

Christ fulfills the role of our spiritual High Priest in heaven at God’s right hand. “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” (Hebrews 4:14).

In this exalted position, He functions not only as our Savior but also as our Mediator between God and man.

By Christ's death, we are reconciled to God by forgiveness of sins. We must exercise faith daily toward the living Christ as He guides us down the road of salvation. We "shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10). We grow in righteous character by Jesus Christ living His life in us (Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27).

To learn more about having faith in Christ and His sacrifice, read our online article "[What Does It Mean to Believe in Jesus Christ?](#)"

We must have a repentant mind for the rest of our lives

Our human nature is affected by the carnal mind, and it will never go away in this life. We will spend the remainder of our lives struggling against the pulls of our nature. We will win some battles; we will lose others. But so long as God sees that we sincerely desire not to sin, that we hate sin and struggle against it, that we continually repent, He is merciful.

"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:11-13). He understands that we are flesh and is quick to forgive us when we repent.

The apostle John summarized both how to repent and God's merciful response to our repentance: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin . . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7-9; see also Psalm 51:2, 7).

It's vitally important to understand and act on the process of repentance and conversion outlined in the Bible.

This is a big topic, and we only skimmed the surface in this chapter. If you would like to learn more about how to repent and align your life with God, please download our free booklet [Change Your Life](#).

Chapter 4: Seven Steps for Overcoming Sin

Overcoming sin—changing—should not be left to chance. A definite plan is needed. What steps can we take to ensure success?

God has called Christians to a life of change. Peter summarized it this way in Acts 3:19: "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

Both "repent" and "be converted" are translated from Greek words that involve *change*. Repent is translated from the Greek word *metanoeo*, which is defined as "change one's mind" (Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*). "Be converted" is from the Greek word *epistrepho*, defined as "to change direction" (*ibid.*).

Any major project—a building, an extended trip, a wedding, etc.—requires planning. Any task worth doing is worth devoting meaningful thought and preparation to.

Christian conversion—overcoming sin—is no different.

Here are seven tried and tested steps that, if used, will help us in overcoming sin.

Step 1: Determine that you truly want to overcome

This sounds simple. However, too many people fail to change because they really don't want to expend the time and effort necessary to make the changes they need to make. We tell ourselves, "I want to overcome this problem." But we don't do what is necessary to overcome.

Most of us realize that we always find time to do the things we really want to do. If there is something we really want to do, we generally don't let anything stand in the way of our doing it.

However, it is also natural to keep putting off those things we really don't want to do.

So why don't we overcome those harmful habits, wrong words and evil thoughts that so easily beset us? We must ask ourselves, "Do I really want to overcome them?" How much effort and planning have we put into making the changes we need to make?

Changing old habits—ways of doing things, ways of thinking and speaking—is not easy. Sometimes such changes are literally painful (especially if there is a physical addiction to overcome). And changing any habit of thought, word or deed is not easy because the change takes us out of our comfort zone. Old ways of doing things are comfortable. We follow those ways automatically. Changing requires constant alertness, effort and a willingness to face the discomfort of change.

Therefore, the first step is to determine that we really want to change badly enough to make plans and put in the needed time and effort. We will never follow the rest of these steps unless we really want to change.

Step 2: Clearly identify the sins you need to overcome

To honestly search for and see our own sins is unpleasant. Why? No correction is pleasant (Hebrews 12:11). Even self-correction is unpleasant. However, self-correction is less painful than being corrected by someone else. We don't like to see the areas of our lives that need to be changed. It is painful to see our failings. But, if we are going to change, we must be committed to finding and facing our faults.

To understand how painful this is, we have to ask ourself, "When was the last time I asked my mate or anyone to show me a fault I need to change?" The answer in the majority of cases will be, "Never!" We don't like to look for our faults. But we must, because self-examination is something a Christian is instructed to do (2 Corinthians 13:5).

In prayer we can seek God's help to see where we need to change. We find such a prayer in Jeremiah 10:23-24: "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing."

If we ask God to show us our sins, He will. But be prepared to see them. Seeing our sins will be painful. If we don't remember that we asked God to help us see them, we may try to forget what we see instead of learning from

If we just stop the outward "show" of sin without changing the underlying reason, our sin will not be fully overcome.

them and seeking to implement the steps for overcoming those sins.

Identifying sin in ourselves is more than just identifying wrong thoughts, words and deeds. We must also identify the cause of sin. Why did

we think, say or do what we did? The reason will most often be some form of selfishness or lust (see 1 John 2:15-16).

Unless we work on overcoming the cause of our sins, we will keep repeating them. If we just stop the outward "show" of sin without changing the underlying reason, our sin will not be fully overcome.

To completely overcome sin we must be seeking to honestly see what the sin is and its cause, and be truly committed to overcoming both the sin and the cause.

Step 3: Study to learn what should replace the cause of sin

For every sin of selfishness or lust, there is a way of righteous love that should be put in its place. Once we have

seen the cause of our sins, we must seek to learn the way of righteousness that needs to replace it.

The way of righteousness needs to become the way we live. This involves studying God's Word—the Bible—seeking to learn and understand the spirit of God's laws. The letter of the law reveals what we are to *do*. But it is possible to outwardly do what is right with a wrong attitude. It is the spirit of God's law that reveals how we are to think as well as conduct ourselves.

Jesus revealed this principle in Matthew 5:27-28: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Every sin that we commit has some cause—some aspect of selfishness or lust. In order to overcome the cause of sin, we need to learn how God wants us to be. This involves learning God's way of love as revealed by the spirit of His laws. Paul expressed this in simple terms in Romans 12:21: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Once we know how God wants us to think and conduct ourselves, we can proceed to the next step.

Step 4: Meditate on living by what God says is right

Knowledge is useless unless we understand how to apply it. Too often having knowledge of God's way of life does not transfer to our daily living. Meditation—taking sufficient time to deeply think about a specific incident or concept—is an important tool for learning how to apply what we learn from our study of God's Word.

Every sin we commit is triggered by something we encounter in our daily lives. We may be late for an appointment. As a result, we get impatient with others if anything happens to further delay us.

Sin is set in motion when we don't respond in a right manner to some occurrence in our daily lives. In step 2 we should have identified the cause of our sins. As we identify the cause, we should also take note of what triggers the sinful response.

Meditation helps us to mentally practice having the right response before we again face the triggering situation. In our personal time of quiet reflection, we can meditate on what we should do when we see or sense that a situation may lead to a wrong response. We can call this mentally practicing righteousness. Or, as Paul said in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true . . . noble . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good report, if there is any virtue and . . . anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

This kind of meditation helps prepare our minds for responding righteously when we should. For further study on this tool for spiritual growth, see the online article “[What Is Meditation?](#)”

Step 5: Pray for God’s help to remember the right response

For each of us, it seems that there is some sin that “easily ensnares us” (Hebrews 12:1). These are sins that we should be working on overcoming first. We should daily ask God in prayer to help us. We need to ask Him to help us remember to have the righteous response come to our minds when the trigger situation arises.

If we are truly committed to changing and are asking God for His assistance, He will spark the right thoughts in our minds through His Spirit. (We’ll study more about how to receive God’s Spirit in the following chapters.)

God wants us to change, and He will help. One way we draw closer to God is by seeking to live righteously. God has promised to draw near to us if we draw near to Him (James 4:8).

But to draw close to God, we need to be committed to living His way of life and praying for His help. To learn more about prayer, see the articles in the Life, Hope & Truth section “[How to Pray](#).”

Step 6: Begin living the right way

Right habits take time to build. They will not be built if we do not replace our old habits with new, godly ways of living. We have to implement what we have learned to actually change the way we live.

God offers us power and help through His Spirit. That power—and the ability to use it—will grow as we use it to live rightly. Paul reassures us: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Once we begin to practice righteousness, we must continue with step 7.

Step 7: Don’t give up

We may not use the right response the first time it is needed. However, if the right response came to mind (even after the fact), that is progress. We need to keep seeking God’s help. If we continue to strive to live rightly, we will begin responding correctly sooner. Eventually, our first response will be correct. The sin will be replaced with righteousness. Evil will be overcome with good.

These steps have been used and proven to work. But they will work only if we really want to use them and if we have

the spiritual help we need through God’s Holy Spirit. What do we need to do to receive the Holy Spirit?

Chapter 5: What Is Baptism?

What does the Bible say about baptism? What is the purpose and meaning of baptism according to the Bible? If you are a believer, should you seek to be baptized?

What is baptism according to the Bible?

The Bible teaches that baptism is a ceremony every truly repentant person must go through to have his or her sins forgiven and to start living the converted way of life. The repentant person is baptized by being fully immersed, from head to toe, in water.

Baptism is a common practice in many churches. However, there’s much disagreement about what it means and how it should be practiced. Some churches don’t baptize at all, others fully immerse people in water, and some just use a little water and pour or sprinkle it. Some churches baptize infants or children, and others baptize only adults.

Considering all these different ideas and practices, we must ask: What does the Bible actually say about baptism?

What is the purpose and meaning of baptism?

According to the Bible, baptism is a ceremony in which a person is symbolically cleansed of sin by being totally immersed in water. It is followed by the laying on of hands, which is how a Christian receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. A person becomes begotten of God when the Spirit of God dwells in him or her. If this person remains faithful, he or she will become an immortal child of God when Jesus Christ returns.

The basic purpose of baptism is an outward ceremony representing spiritual changes in a person’s life.

What does the word *baptize* mean?

The Greek word translated “baptize” in English Bibles is *baptizō*. According to Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates, this

Greek word means “to immerse, submerge for a religious purpose” (*The Complete Word Study New Testament*, p. 895). *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* explains its meaning similarly: “to dip repeatedly, to immerse, submerge.” In ancient times, the word was used to describe the sinking of a ship.

So the basic meaning of the word *baptize* is to completely immerse or submerge in water. This itself gives strong support for immersion being the biblical mode of baptism.

Recognizing the meaning of the word, the Jewish New Testament identifies John the Baptist as “the Immerser” in Matthew 3:1 and states that he immersed those who came to him (verse 11).

What mode of baptism is biblical?

In addition to the very meaning of the word *baptize* being to immerse, the Bible provides additional evidence that the biblical mode of baptism is total immersion.

- “Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized” (John 3:23).
- “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water” (Matthew 3:16).
- “And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:38-39).

These scriptures show us three important facts about biblical baptism: baptism requires water, and a baptized person goes *down* into the water and then comes *up* out of the water. These descriptions perfectly match the meaning of the word *baptize* and describe baptism by full immersion.

To be baptized in the biblical manner, a person must be fully immersed in water, from head to toe.

To a Christian, baptism is more than a ritualistic ceremony. It is an outward acknowledgment of a person’s repentance of past sins and desire to change, to be cleansed from past guilt, and to become a disciple of Jesus Christ as a member of the Church of God.

What are the symbols of baptism?

The basic meanings of the symbols of baptism are as follows:

- **Water.** The use of water symbolizes the washing away of our sins and the purification of our life. We are cleansed as our old sins are symbolically washed away and removed from our record (Acts 22:16).
- **Going down into the water and being fully immersed.** This symbolizes the death and burial of

our “old man” (our old sinful nature and character) in the watery grave of baptism. We are “buried with Him through baptism into death” (Romans 6:4).

- **Coming up out of the water.** This symbolizes our being raised to a new life (Romans 6:4). We are “made alive together with Him” and are “forgiven” our sins (Colossians 2:12-13).

To explore the meaning of the symbols of baptism in greater depth, read our online article “[What Do the Symbols of Baptism Mean?](#)”

Baptism and the beginning of the Church

On the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, thousands of people, many from various foreign lands, filled the bustling city of Jerusalem to observe this annual festival. At about 9 in the morning they heard an unusual noise, and some of them went to investigate the cause. Finding Peter and others speaking in different languages, many dismissed them as being drunk. However, Peter denied their accusation and explained to them

In the ceremonial system God set up for ancient Israel, water was often used to represent spiritual cleansing and purifying.

the reason for the commotion (Acts 2:1-15).

He then recounted an Old Testament prophecy from the book of Joel about the giving of the Holy Spirit and stated that it

had been fulfilled that very day! He also showed that Jesus was the promised Messiah whom they had unjustly put to death (verses 16-36).

His words were so persuasive they asked him what they should do. “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (verse 38). And about 3,000 of them did.

It is clear that the early New Testament Church practiced baptism.

Origin of water baptism

The New Testament traces the idea of water baptism all the way back to the Exodus from Egypt. The apostle Paul explained that the ancient Israelites went through a type of baptism when they crossed through the Red Sea while under the cloud (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

They were, in a sense, immersed in water—with water on both sides. This Red Sea baptism marked their transition

from slavery to freedom. When a Christian is baptized today, it marks his or her transition from slavery of sin to true freedom (Romans 6:6).

In the ceremonial system God set up for ancient Israel, water was often used to represent spiritual cleansing and purifying. Leviticus 15 is especially informative in this regard.

Leviticus 16:4 shows that in fulfilling their priestly duties, the Levites were sometimes commanded to bathe themselves completely before they entered the tabernacle (and later on, the temple). A great basin was erected for that purpose. This was how God taught them the importance of spiritual purity.

Baptism requirements

The Bible's most basic requirement for baptism is that people must repent—that is, be sorry for their sins, desire forgiveness of those sins, become totally committed in their hearts to stop sinning and start living in accordance with God's instructions. A person should come to this point prior to being baptized (Acts 2:38).

Repentance is a two-step process that begins as a gift from God (Romans 2:4). He leads us to repentance by opening our eyes to our need to stop living in rebellion to His commands.

Once we humbly see our need to repent, we must then take the second step, which requires us to do our part in changing from the way we had been living to the way God wants us to live.

What happens after baptism?

After a person is baptized, there is another important ceremony that usually occurs immediately after he or she has emerged from the water. The minister baptizing the person will lay his hands on him or her and pray to God, asking Him to give the person the Holy Spirit. This is called the “laying on of hands” (Hebrews 6:2).

It is through this ceremony that God gives a person the gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Though many churches practice baptism in some form, very few practice the ceremony of the laying on of hands.

To learn more about this important aspect of true Christian baptism, read the online article “[Laying On of Hands](#).”

Why is receiving the Holy Spirit so important?

On Pentecost, Peter stated that people should repent and be baptized “for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Paul

later added that “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). Having God's Spirit thus identifies us as Christians.

Having God's Holy Spirit also allows us to grow in the fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). As we continue to grow spiritually, Christ is formed in us—meaning we take on the same way of thinking and acting as Jesus (Galatians 4:19).

Having God's Holy Spirit is also our “guarantee” that we will be changed into immortal spirit beings when Christ returns (2 Corinthians 5:4-5; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:49-53).

To learn more about the importance of God's Holy Spirit, read our [Life, Hope & Truth](#) articles on the “[Holy Spirit](#).”

Chapter 6: Baptism Provides a Clean Start

Is water baptism essential for salvation? God wants 21st-century Christians to understand the effects of baptism in providing a clean start to a new life.

Jennifer stood waiting at the steps of the pool, giving her friends and family time to gather around in order to witness her baptism. She had been thinking and praying about making this commitment to God for quite some time. And she had gone through a series of counseling sessions with her pastor that helped her understand this step and convinced her of her need to take it.

Jennifer felt good about her decision and was confident that it was the right course of action. It was just about time for her to step into the water and formally enter her covenant relationship with God.

Is baptism necessary today?

But was it really necessary for Jennifer to undergo this ancient practice that originated in type under the Old Covenant (Hebrews 9:10)? Must Christians be baptized today to have a clean start?

According to some groups, including Christian Scientists, Quakers, the Salvation Army and Unitarians, the answer to both these questions is “No.”

Those who do not practice baptism vary in their explanations as to why they do not, but in general, they consider baptism to be an outdated ritual that is no longer necessary under the New Covenant. Reasons given often include the following:

- What one experiences in his or her heart is what is most important.
- External actions to reflect one’s inner thoughts are superfluous.
- The scriptures on baptism are ambiguous.
- People can live holy lives without being baptized.

So are the scriptures on baptism really that vague? Is there any value to being baptized? What are the effects of baptism? Instead of relying on human opinions and reasoning, let’s see what the biblical record shows.

Christ’s example and instruction on baptism

A quick review of Christ’s actions just before the beginning of His ministry is insightful as a lesson for us today. As we will soon see, Jesus taught that baptism was very important.

When John the Baptist began preaching in the wilderness of Judea, people from “Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:5-6). Though Jesus had no sins to confess, He asked John to baptize Him (verse 13).

After Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God descended upon Him and a voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (verse 17).

Why did God the Father make this statement after Jesus was baptized? And, of special concern to us, will the Father be pleased if we are baptized? It seems obvious that He thinks baptism is important!

Scriptures such as 1 Peter 2:21 and 1 John 2:6 show that Christians are to follow the example of Jesus Christ. We are to walk as He walked, do as He did. We are indeed to be baptized as He was. When we follow Christ’s example, God the Father is, no doubt, pleased with us as well.

Jesus’ teaching on baptism was not limited to His personal example. During His earthly ministry, He had His disciples baptize those who believed (John 3:22). It is also insightful to note that Christ’s disciples baptized more people than John the Baptist (John 4:1-2).

After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and gave them instructions on how they were to take His message to the world.

Note that His instructions, which are sometimes referred to as the commission of the Church, include baptizing those who respond: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Jesus also pointedly stated, “He who believes *and is baptized* will be saved” (Mark 16:16). Christ’s teaching on the importance and effects of baptism is quite clear!

Since Jesus clearly taught baptism, let’s now consider what we learn by following His instruction.

Effects of baptism: what we learn and receive from baptism

Repentance. When people in Peter’s audience on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 asked the apostle what they should do, he told them to “repent, and let every one of you be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Repentance, which is the initial step toward baptism, means changing our way of life because of a change in our thinking. It means that in hindsight, we realize that the way we had been living was not in

accordance with God’s good and beneficial laws. The process of repentance—which we are

led to by God (Romans 2:4)—helps us understand the seriousness of sin. It is marked by a strong desire on our part to be forgiven of our sins, to stop sinning and to change our sinful nature (Jeremiah 17:9). It includes the recognition of the value of Christ’s sacrifice—His blood that covers our sins (Ephesians 1:7).

Repentance is part of the message that Jesus told His disciples to preach (Luke 24:47). Why? Because, as Jesus had earlier said, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

Death, burial and resurrection. After one repents of his or her sins, the next step is to be baptized—which means being immersed in water. This act symbolizes three important concepts.

First, baptism represents the death of the old man—the way we lived before repenting. Paul twice described this concept as being “crucified” with Christ (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20).

Next, after someone dies, he is generally buried. Baptism also pictures the burial of our old self—“the old man”—with all of our sins, which earn us the death penalty. This reminds us to put away completely our old way of life.

The Teaching of the Apostles About Baptism

Only a few days after receiving the commission to make disciples of all the nations and baptize them, Jesus' disciples gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost—one of God's annual festivals (Acts 2:1). It was there on this holy day that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers (verses 2-4). Jesus had told His disciples that after He left them, He would send them this special power that proceeds from the Father (John 15:26; 16:7).

Empowered by this special gift from God, Peter—the disciple who had previously denied Christ three times—now publicly explained that Jesus Christ was responsible for sending the Holy Spirit that day (Acts 2:14-33). Peter also advised those who were

listening to repent “and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (verse 38). Peter didn't present baptism as simply an option.

The approximately 3,000 people who were baptized following Peter's preaching also received the Holy Spirit that day (verse 41). As Christ's apostles preached the gospel of the Kingdom and as the Church grew, baptism was the common practice and expectation of those who responded (Acts 8:12, 36, 38; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16). When Paul was called by God, he responded by being baptized (Acts 9:18).

Jesus' disciples taught others as they had been taught by Christ. And this teaching included baptism. When we respond to God, we, too, need to be baptized!

As Paul explained, “We were buried with Him through baptism into death” (Romans 6:4).

The third concept symbolized by baptism is resurrection. Coming up from under the water after being baptized represents our resurrection to a new life in Christ. As Paul further noted, “If we have been united together in the likeness of His [Christ's] death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (verse 5).

Baptism helps impress these three important concepts within our minds. This physical act helps us realize the spiritual significance of baptism.

Forgiveness of sins. Baptism is far more than just a symbolic exercise. Indeed, there are two very significant beneficial effects of baptism in addition to the spiritual understanding we gain from obeying Christ's command to be baptized.

The first is the forgiveness of our sins. Indeed, this is one of the key reasons for being baptized. As Peter said, “Let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for *the remission of your sins*” (Acts 2:38). Through baptism, we accept the sacrifice of Christ, which washes away our sins (Acts 22:16) and gives us a clean start.

Receiving the Holy Spirit. A second important effect of baptism is the opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit. Again, Peter's teaching was: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and *you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38).

Baptism, accompanied by the laying on of hands (Acts 19:6), is the way God has established for us to receive this precious gift.

Romans 8 documents several important benefits that come to us because we have God's Holy Spirit.

First, this power from God allows us to set aside ungodly activities and live “according to the Spirit” (verse 4). When we allow this Spirit to lead us, we are called the “children of God” (verse 16).

Furthermore, having God's Holy Spirit is our guarantee of eternal life (verses 11, 13, 23).

To learn more about this baptismal promise, see the articles in the LifeHopeandTruth.com section “[Holy Spirit](#).”

Action required: should you be baptized?

Following the biblical instruction to be baptized underscores an important biblical principle: What we do is very important to God. The true, timeless religion of the Bible calls for physical action—not just knowledge and understanding. As Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

The author of Psalm 111 made this insightful observation: “A good understanding have all those who do His commandments” (verse 10). Echoing this principle and the teaching of Jesus, James emphasized that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). The actions we take before and during baptism set the stage for continued obedience to God afterward.

Jennifer's baptism

After everyone had gathered around, Jennifer was baptized by being completely immersed in the pool. She entered into a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. She had hands laid on her with a prayer for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and she has been given a clean start and has begun her spiritual journey toward eternal life as a child of God in His Kingdom.

Looking back on her decision, she says it is the best one she has ever made. The decision to respond to God's calling to be baptized was a good one for Jennifer. It can be the same for you!

Chapter 7: Should You Be Baptized?

When coming to an understanding of the Bible's teaching about baptism and the laying on of hands, many people ask: *Should I be baptized?*

Since that is an extremely personal decision that only you can answer, we will simply provide five questions a person must answer "yes" to before he or she is ready to be baptized.

1. Are you being called by God?

As John 6:44 and other passages show, a person can't just decide to become a Christian. We must be drawn by the Father. If you are becoming convinced of the truths of the Bible and feel compelled to act on them, you are likely being called by God. See more in our online article "[What Does It Mean to Be Called by God?](#)"

2. Are you willing to repent of your sins and believe the true gospel?

Jesus summarized the action steps of His message this way: "Repent, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Are you willing to repent of your sins and begin living a new life? Do you truly *believe* Christ's gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God, and all it entails? Do you *believe* God (not just that He exists, but what He says)? Do you *believe* Jesus Christ lived and died for your sins? Do you *believe* the Bible is truly inspired by God? Do you *believe* what the Bible teaches?

3. Do you hate that you have sinned and desire to have your sins forgiven?

All of us have sinned and have our sins on our spiritual record. Those sins have brought the death penalty on us, have separated us from our Creator and have brought suffering on us and others. If we recognize sin and its consequences and wholeheartedly desire to have it removed from our lives, repentance followed by baptism is our only option.

4. Have you gone as far as you can go without God's Holy Spirit within you?

We do have the ability to make behavior changes on our own power. But in order to totally commit your life to God, bring your life into submission to Him and develop His character, you need His power within you. If you have come to the point in your life where you are committed to God's way but realize that by your own power you are limited in how far you can go—you need God's Holy Spirit inside you.

5. Have you "counted the cost"?

In Luke 14:28 Jesus said that those who truly desire to follow Him must "count the cost." What is the cost of being baptized? *Your life*. You have to be willing to give your entire life—your thinking, your behavior, your motivations, your time—to Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul referred to this as making ourselves "a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). You have to be willing to fully surrender to Him. Are you willing to do that and commit to never looking back?

If you can answer "yes" to all these questions, you are on the path to being baptized. We do recommend that you counsel with a minister about this decision—since it is literally the most important decision you will make in your life. It is a decision that has eternal ramifications. And you may have other questions if you were baptized as a child or without fully understanding these things.

If you would like to discuss baptism, the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, has ministers available throughout the world to serve you. We can connect you to a minister in your local area. See our "[Congregations](#)" page for contact information of the pastor nearest to you, or email us at info@cogwa.org.

To continue your study on these life-changing subjects, download our booklet *Change Your Life!* For an even deeper study, enroll in our [Bible Study Course](#). Lesson 10, especially, takes a deep dive into the subjects of repentance, baptism and Christian conversion.

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LifeHopeandTruth.com exists to fill a critical void in this world: the lack of understanding about the purpose of life, the lack of realistic hope for a better future and the lack of truth!

Neither religion nor science has satisfactorily addressed these issues, so people today are of divided opinions, confused or, worst of all, don't care anymore. The ancient words of the prophet Isaiah ring so true today: "Truth is fallen in the street." Why? Is it because God was right when He warned that humans are inclined to reject Him and usually choose not to know Him?

We are here for people who are searching for answers, who are ready to prove all things or who are hungry for more than what they've been taught most of their lives about God, the Bible, the meaning of life and how to live. We want to help you truly understand the good news of the gospel and fulfill Jesus Christ's admonition to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

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