

**MY
NEXT
STEP**

**LIVING AS A
CHILD OF GOD**

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It is an enormous privilege for me to be able to work in the kingdom of our Lord with you!

- Philip Canarsky

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INTRODUCTION

I wrote this book in an attempt to answer one simple question: How should I live after making my decision to follow Jesus?

This question takes many different forms; from the person who has just made their decision to follow Christ and is confused by not knowing how to live now, to the person who has been a good Christian for many years, but feels that following Jesus must be more than just being a good Christian.

In the Christian world we teach very clearly how to make the salvation decision and enter into peace with God.

However, after making that decision, our teaching isn't as clear. Sometimes we unnecessarily complicate the Christian life by presenting a system that is too complex and legalistic. On the other extreme, sometimes we talk about the Christian life as if it were a life of trying to be a good person and going to church.

So, those who want to follow Christ are still left with the question: How should I live after making my decision to follow Jesus?

In this book, I try to explain the model of living for God that Jesus demonstrated with his life, and taught to his first followers.

My desire is that together we can better follow Jesus and better serve God.

Colossians 2 6 So then, just as you received Christ
Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,

1

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

There is an interesting phenomenon that exists in churches today. We tend to put a lot of emphasis on making the initial decision to become God's child, and rightly so. Life as God's child starts by coming to faith in Jesus, by deciding to repent and by being baptized. At times however, we don't explain how to live as a child of God after making those decisions.

It is like saying, "Now that you are baptized, just keep coming to church each week and live a good life." I don't

know about you, but that sounds really boring. Following Christ has to be more than that!

Is there something more?

We think that being a Christian means not having bad habits and going to church, but deep inside, we know there must be something more. Being God's child has to be bigger than just going to church and changing some behaviors.

Think about it. If the all-powerful God of the universe is your Father and has forgiven you, don't you think that the relationship would consist in something more than just going to church and not doing certain things?

The reality is that, yes, there is something more. Being God's child transforms your life. It is the most radical change that you can make. It isn't just about receiving salvation and then trying to be a good person.

The reality is that when you decide to become God's child, when you repent and are baptized, you are starting a brand new life. It isn't the end of the road. Instead, you are starting on a new road. Being on this new road has a new goal and purpose.

THE GOAL IS TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

The goal of following Christ is to become like Christ.

1 John 2 6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Colossians 2 6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,

God says that if we are his children, we have to become like Jesus, imitate Jesus, treat other people the way Jesus treated others, live close to God like Jesus did and work for God like Jesus worked for his Father.

BIG IDEA

God wants his children to become more and more like Jesus

When we see the goal of the Christian life, it becomes easier for us to also see how we are to live this life. The goal of the Christian life isn't just going to church and becoming a better person. The goal of the Christian life is to know Christ and to become like him.

Constant progress

The Bible teaches that all of God's children should live in a state of constant progress in their lives. We are to progressively allow God to change us. In the words of the

apostle Paul, being a child of God means living a life that is always changing and becoming more like Jesus.

Philippians 3 *12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Obviously, being a follower of Jesus is more than just making a decision. It is entering into a lifestyle of constantly living with the desire to change and become more like Jesus.

Our salvation motivates us

Many people try to better themselves and become different. Some want to change for their husband or wife, others want to become a better father or mother, others want to become more acceptable to God and earn their salvation and still others want to change in order to have a better life.

For the child of God, the motivation to live this life of constant changes, and become more and more like Jesus,

should be to please our Father, God. It is because we are children of God that we should want to become more and more like Christ.

The motivation to live a life of progress and changes isn't to win God's favor, work to be a better person or fulfill an obligation. It should be the desire to please our Father, who gave his Son to pay the price for our sins.

Titus 2 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. 12 It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 as we wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. 14 He gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good.

We don't know how

We know how to live like we lived before. However, we don't know how to live differently and become more like Christ. Jesus was perfect; we aren't perfect. Jesus treated other

people perfectly; we don't always treat each other very well. Jesus never sinned; we are experts in sinning.

HOW CAN WE CHANGE TO BECOME MORE LIKE CHRIST?

The good news is that in the Bible, God tells us how to live this life of constant changes that he expects from his children.

How we live this life as a child of God has two sides. On one hand, God changes us to make us more like Christ. On the other hand, we have to practice certain habits that take us towards the changes that God wants to make in us.

1 - God changes us

The Bible teaches that being more and more like Christ is a product of being a child of God. The Bible explains it like this: by entering into peace with God, He makes you His child and then He changes you.

Philippians 1 3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Here, Paul says that God started a work in us when he saved us, and that he will continue to transform us, change us and mature us.

That is why he gives us his Spirit when we decide to turn to him and are baptized.

Acts 2 38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God lives inside of each child of God, and the Spirit is continually changing him to become more and more like Jesus. The Bible says that the Spirit in us produces a transformation within us.

Galatians 5 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.

The Spirit of God literally changes God's children, from the inside out.

2 - Our habits change us

Practically speaking, one of the main mechanisms the Spirit of God uses to change us are habits that lead us to change. They are habits that put us in a place where God changes us.

As we learn to live with these habits in our lives, God changes us to become more like Christ.

Colossians 2 6 Therefore, as you received Christ

Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,

How we live after we enter into peace with God is very important. Our way of life will either take us closer to or farther from God.

"My Next Step" explains the habits that lead to change

My hope is that through this book, we will better learn how to live the Christian life in a way that leads us to know Christ and become more like Him.

We will learn four practices that lead us to become more like Jesus. These four disciplines create an environment in us through which God can keep maturing and changing us.

They are not four lessons to learn or steps to complete, rather they are four habits that we will learn to incorporate into our lives. The disciplines that we will see in this study are habits that, when they are present in our life, produce a transformation in us. They make us more like Christ. By making these disciplines part of our life, God will continue changing us more and more.

2

LIVING CLOSE TO GOD

Many times we think that following Christ or being a child of God has to do with making a decision and then being a good person. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The big idea of this book is that God wants his sons and daughters to become more and more like Christ. Jesus is our example, and by living life as his followers, we should become more and more like him.

There are various disciplines, or habits, that as they become part of our lives, naturally lead us to become more and more like Jesus. The goal of this book is to help us to integrate these habits into our lives.

The first habit that leads us to become more like Jesus is that of living close to God. However, what we know about life is that living close to God *doesn't* come naturally to us.

WE WANT A LITTLE BIT OF GOD

Everyone wants a little bit of God. Even the hardest criminal wears a cross on his chain. We all want to have God in our lives.

However, at the same time, we don't want to lose control of our life. If God wants to be part of our life, we want to define what that relationship will look like.

We tend to put God into boxes

We let him into our life, but not into our whole life. We have compartments for God, well-defined places and moments where we are "with God."

For example:

- Going to church on Sunday
- Saying a prayer before going to sleep

- Reading from the Bible in the morning
- Being with Christian friends

What are some of the boxes that you have in your life for God?

We don't share our life with him

In spite of the fact that we include God in different parts of our life, the reality is that God isn't in every part of our lives.

- When we have problems, we talk to a friend before we talk to God.
- When something good happens, we pick up the phone instead of closing our eyes and saying "Thanks!" to God.
- We don't pray constantly in our minds throughout the day.
- We prefer to watch TV instead of spending an hour reading God's Word in the evenings.

When all is said and done, God is part of our lives, but he isn't part of our whole life. However, that isn't what God wants.

GOD WANTS TO BE NEAR

God wants to be near to his children. In the entire Bible, one theme that is repeated over and over again is that of God wanting to share life with his children. What God really desires is to have a relationship of Father and child with us.

It is his desire

This desire to be near to his children is a constant theme in the Bible. God always expresses his desire that his children be close to him, and invariably his children move away from him.

2 Corinthians 6 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

God desires to live close to us. He wants to be part of our lives. He wants us to talk with him continually.

More for us

The desire that God has isn't so much that he wants to be close to us, but that he wants us to be close to him. It isn't that God needs to be close to us, but rather that he made us with a profound need to be close to him.

Our life isn't complete when we live far from God or when we live lives with God in different boxes or compartments of our life.

BEING LIKE CHRIST

Remember, the goal of the Christian life is to be like Jesus, it is to imitate our Savior. When we look at Jesus' life, we see that he lived very close to God throughout his whole life.

Jesus lived close to God

During his whole life, Jesus spent a good deal of time being close to God. The Bible tells of many times when, after working all day, he spent the night talking with God instead of sleeping:

Luke 6 12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

Talking with God was such a big part of his life that he even spent the night before his death talking with God.

The question is, if Jesus is God, why was it necessary for him to spend time with God the Father? The reason is that he needed to be with his Father. So much so, that in spite of being God, he wanted to spend a lot of time with his Father, God.

We also need to spend a lot of time with our Father. We need to experience the same communion that Jesus had with the Father. To become like Jesus, we need to spend a lot of time with God.

How can we be like Jesus?

If our goal in life is to be like Jesus, then we have to ask ourselves, how can we be like Jesus and spend our life close to God?

There is a habit that we can integrate into our lives that produces an uncommon communion between us and our Father, God.

BIG IDEA

You share your life with God when you talk with him and listen to him

The way that we really share our lives with God, instead of just having him be present in a few specific moments, is by talking with him and listening to him throughout the day.

Listening to his voice and talking to him are the most important disciplines for a son or daughter of God. This is because through them, we let God enter into our whole life.

The habit that changes us

Talking to God and listening to his voice is the habit that changes us. It makes us become more like Jesus because it puts us close to God. Then, like Jesus, we spend our lives with the constant presence of God.

YOU LISTEN TO HIS VOICE WHEN YOU READ THE BIBLE

Even though it sounds weird, God says that through the Bible, he literally talks to us. He communicates his words to us, not with an audible voice, but through the written words.

It is more than a book, it is the Word of God

The reason that God talks to us when we read the Bible is because this book is more than just a book. It was written by several different men, but it is very different from other books written by men and women.

The difference is that God literally inspired the writing of this book. In other words, he inspired the men who wrote it, while they were writing. Because of this, the words that came out of their pens weren't their own words, but the words of God.

2 Timothy 3 16 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

This book is different from all other books because God inspired the writing of its very words. Because of this, we can believe that every word that is in this book is the Word of God.

God talks when we read

Now, the most incredible thing about this book is that it doesn't just contain words that God spoke a long time ago, to other people, but that they are words that God speaks directly to us. In other words, reading the Bible is not like reading just another history book.

The reality is that God talks today with us through these words that he previously inspired.

Hebrews 4 12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything*

*is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of
him to whom we must give account.*

When you read the Bible, God talks to you. Every time you open the Bible and read, even if it is only for a few minutes, God talks to you. Every time you read, you are letting God come into your life.

YOU TALK TO HIM WHEN YOU PRAY

You share your life with God when you hear his voice in his Word. You also share your life with God when you talk with him, or when you pray.

Praying is much more than just repeating formal prayers that you sometimes hear in churches. Prayer is nothing more than talking to God. Prayer is your conversation with God.

It is informal

Many times, the examples of prayers that we see in churches or in the movies are long prayers and they use a lot of big, religious words. They are prayers that sound really good, but honestly don't mean much.

True prayer is much more informal than this. It is simply talking to God. You can talk to God using your own words, just like when you talk to your friends.

It can be something you do with your eyes closed in your room, or with your eyes open while you are driving or at work. You can pray out loud, or you can pray in your mind and heart with your thoughts.

It is a conversation

The most important thing to remember about prayer is that it is nothing more than a conversation between you and God.

- It is talking.
- It is asking him when you have a doubt.
- It is asking for advice: "What should I do?"
- It is telling him about your life.
- It is asking him "why?" when you don't understand.
- It is sharing your pain and sadness with him.

Prayer is talking with your Father. It should be a running conversation between us and God throughout our day.

A NEW HABIT

To really share our lives with God, we have to begin a new habit of spending time with him.

Practically speaking, this means:

Setting aside a specific time and place

The most important discipline that a son or daughter of God can start is the discipline of having a set time and place where every day he or she spends time talking with God and reading the Bible.

Sometimes we expect that reading the Bible and praying will just happen naturally, without planning or disciplining ourselves. Unfortunately, spending time with God isn't something that just happens. In order to get into the habit of spending time with God, we must have a specific time and place that we dedicate to being with God.

Now, it isn't overly important how much time you spend in this specific time and place reading the Bible and praying. It can be ten minutes or two hours. The most important thing is to spend this same time with God each day.

Don't disconnect afterward

If we are going to share our lives with God, we have to read and pray during our day. It is good to read and pray in the morning before starting the day. However, this doesn't automatically involve God in the rest of our life.

So then, to involve God in your whole life, you have to find moments during the day in which you can read the Bible. In the morning, before going to bed, over lunch or whenever. It

doesn't have to be hours and hours of study, it can just be reading a paragraph and then thinking about what you read.

As far as prayer goes, the goal of God's child should be to maintain a constant conversation with God during the entire day. That is, in your mind always be talking with him.

The truth is that, at the beginning, these disciplines are going to be a bit difficult to incorporate into your life. However, if every day you make an effort to read the Bible during the day and maintain a conversation in your mind with God, you will see that God will be a bigger and bigger part of your life.

HOW DO I START THIS NEW HABIT?

If you don't have the habit of reading the Bible and praying every day, it can be a little difficult to know how to start.

In reality, it isn't difficult to incorporate this habit into your life. There are three practical steps that you can take to start to regularly spend time with God:

1. Choose a book of the Bible to read. I recommend starting with 1 John, if you haven't read this book before. It is a short book, with a very powerful message. It doesn't matter which book you choose,

what is important it to just choose a book of the Bible that you will read.

2. Read this book for 10-15 minutes in the morning. Set aside 10-15 minutes in the morning, before you start your day. It is best to do this before you do anything else, because if you don't, your day will fill up with things to do and you won't have time. In these 15 minutes, you can read a section from the book you choose, and talk to God about what you are thinking.
3. Read this book for another 10-15 minutes at night. Set aside another 10-15 minutes at night, before going to bed, to read another section of the book you choose and to talk with God before going to sleep.

If you start and continue this discipline, you will have more communion with your Father, God. What you will find is that, in time, you will be talking to God and reading the Bible more throughout the day, not just in the morning and at night.

IT IS A BATTLE

Spending time with God by reading the Bible and praying isn't easy, rather it is a battle.

It is difficult

For many, getting into the habit of reading the Bible every day, and then sticking with that habit, is extremely difficult. At times when you are reading, it can seem incredibly boring. Other times, it is difficult to understand what we read. Still other times, there is a lot of distractions and it seems impossible to focus.

What many people experience is that reading the Bible is the most difficult activity they attempt in their day.

There is a reason it is difficult

There is a really good reason why it is so difficult to practice the habit of reading the Bible. What we have seen here in this chapter is that God literally talks to us when we read this book.

However, Satan, God's enemy, desperately desires that God's children not hear the voice of their Father. So, he does everything he is able to block our time with God.

When you read the Bible, you are entering into a spiritual battle. On one hand, God wants to talk to you, and on the other hand, your enemy doesn't want you to pay attention to God. Because of this, at times it is very difficult to concentrate when you read, or the words just don't make sense, or you become

distracted or tired. Your enemy doesn't want you to listen to your Father.

You have to fight

Yes, it is possible to listen to God's voice, in spite of the battle. It doesn't matter how boring it seems to you, or how distracted you become, if you fight with this book, you will hear the voice of God. If you keep reading even though you are distracted or bored, God will talk to you.

It won't always be boring or impossible to understand. That is God's promise to his children.

Hebrews 4 12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?

What is your next step to spend more time each day with God?

- Do you have a specific time and place where you spend time with God every day?
- Are you in the habit of reading and praying at night before going to bed?

- Do you read and pray in the morning before starting your day?
- Is there a book of the Bible that you are reading through?

The biggest thing you can do in order to grow in your relationship with God is to set aside a time to be with God every day. It is choosing a time and a place, and every day reading the Bible and praying during that time. This habit will lead you to grow, to know God much better and to become more like Jesus.

More like Jesus

The goal of the Christian life isn't just to be a more religious person, but to be more like Jesus.

When we live our lives close to God, we become more and more like Jesus. We learn how to treat others the same way that Jesus treated people, our character is transformed to become more like Jesus and, like Jesus, we know our Father, God, better.

Living close to God every day is essential in order to become more like Jesus.

What change will you make this week?

What change will you make this week to spend more time with God?

Additional Study

What is the Bible?

When you open the Bible for the first time, it can be a little bit confusing. There are different books with different names, and big numbers and small numbers throughout the text. Knowing something about the Bible can help us to start reading and understanding it.

The Bible is a book that contains 66 individual books. You can easily find any of these books by looking in the index at the beginning of the Bible.

The Bible is divided into two parts, the Old and New Testaments. Basically, the books of the Old Testament relates the history between God and man before Christ, and the New Testament books continue the story with Jesus' arrival on earth.

The different sections of the Bible are marked with two systems of numbers. These numbers aren't part of the Bible, they were added after the Bible was written in order to make searching for specific passages in the Bible easier. The big numbers are chapters. Chapters are the large divisions in each book of the Bible. The small numbers are verses. Verses are the small divisions in each chapter.

How should I read the Bible?

The following are some suggestions that are generally helpful in reading the Bible. Of course, there are exceptions to these suggestions, and it isn't necessary to follow them religiously. These suggestions are nothing more than advice.

1. Choose a book and read in order.

It isn't extremely important to follow this suggestion, God can talk to you if you open the Bible to a different place every day and read the first thing you see. However, it is generally easier to understand what you read if you read one book at a time, and if you read that book in order, from start to end.

2. Just read something.

How much you read isn't the most important part of reading the Bible. You can read a chapter, a paragraph or a few words. The most important thing is to read something, and seek to understand and think about what you read. You shouldn't feel bad if you only read a verse, if you then think about that verse during the rest of the day. At the same time, you can understand more of the story of the Bible when you read larger sections all at once. However, the most important thing is to read something, even a little.

3. Seek to understand the meaning of the text as you read.

Instead of just reading something, closing the Bible and forgetting it, you should meditate on the meaning of the passage. This is asking, what is this saying? What does this text mean?

4. Apply what you read to your life.

This is more than just reading. It is even more than reading and understanding the meaning of what you read. It is reading, understanding and then thinking about how you can apply that passage to your life. It is asking, what does this text mean in my life? What should I change?

James 1 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

3

LEAVING SIN

If truly following Christ isn't simply making a decision and then being a good person, but instead living a life of imitating Jesus, then the big question of the Christian life should be "How can I become more like Jesus?"

The second habit that leads us to become more and more like Jesus is that of recognizing and leaving our sin. It is the discipline of continually analyzing our life to be able to see the sin that enters into our character, fighting against that sin and working to leave it behind.

Sin is disobedience

The biblical definition of sin is to "disobey God." We sin when we do something that God has prohibited, or when we don't do something that God has asked us to do.

In the Bible, God describes how his children should live, how they should treat others, how they should talk, think and feel. Sinning is not living how God asks us to live in every area of our lives.

So, a sin can be an action, something we do. Sin can also be a word, a gesture, an attitude or a thought.

We all have persistent sins

The reality is that every person has persistent sins. A persistent sin is when we sin in the same way, doing the same thing, over and over again. It is an area of our life in which we know that we aren't pleasing God. It is a habitual sin.

We all have persistent sins in our lives. You and I disobey God regularly by committing persistent sins. Sometimes, everyone knows what our persistent sin is, and it even becomes a public part of our character. Other times it is more private, no one else knows that in this particular area of our lives we commit the same sin, over and over again. Whether they are

public or private, we all have persistent sins that are part of our lives.

PERSISTENT SIN IS DANGEROUS

All sin, all disobedience to God, is a great offense against our Creator. However, persistent sin is extremely dangerous. It is much more dangerous than the isolated sins that we commit from time to time. Let me say again that all sin is bad, I don't want to minimize a single sin, however persistent sin is the most dangerous sin of all.

Persistent sin is extremely dangerous for the following reasons:

1 - Less like Jesus

Our persistent sin is so dangerous because, when we disobey God, we are less and less like Jesus. Remember, the goal of the life of a child of God is to become more like Jesus. Because of this, God's children are known as followers of Christ, because they follow and imitate him.

During his life, Jesus lived a perfect life. He never sinned, not even one time. He never disobeyed God.

Hebrews 4 14 *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we*

profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.

Becoming like him means not disobeying God as well. The more we become like Jesus, the less we will disobey God. Disobeying God persistently with the same sin, makes us become less and less like Jesus. This is one reason why persistent sin is so dangerous.

1 John 2 3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. 4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

2 - It moves us away from God

Also, our persistent sin is dangerous because it moves us away from God. When we live our life with a constant disobedience, we start moving little by little away from God.

The huge effect of persistent sin in our lives is to separate us from God.

In order to really understand why our persistent sin is so dangerous, we should look at exactly how it moves us away from God.

HOW TO LEAVE GOD

To better understand how our persistent sin moves us away from God, we have to ask the question: How could I ever leave God? It is a question we have to ask when we think about our relationship with God.

This is a question that sometimes comes up when we see others stop following God. It can feel very frustrating and sad when we see others leave God. When we see someone else leave God, we can feel a certain fear that we could also, someday, stop following Christ. Which leads us to ask: Why did he do that? or How could she have left God?

No one decides to leave him all of a sudden

The reality is that no true, sincere follower of Jesus ever just decides, out of the blue, to stop following Jesus. The process to stop following him doesn't start with this decision.

In fact, I imagine that if you asked the majority of Christ's followers if they ever planned on leaving him, they would say

"No!", "Never!" and "I would not ever dream of leaving Jesus." They would say this in spite of the fact that some, undoubtedly, will leave him.

Also, no one stops following Christ overnight. You won't ever see a person who today is a strong, faithful follower of Jesus, decide all of a sudden to not follow him. Deciding to stop following Jesus doesn't happen all of a sudden.

It is a process

The reality is that to stop following Christ is a process. It happens little by little, without us even realizing what is happening, until it is too late.

Hebrews 2 1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

When it says "drift away," it isn't talking about making a decision to leave Jesus. Rather, it is talking about a process of drifting away, not in a single moment, but gradually.

It's like sliding on ice or mud

When someone leaves God, it is somewhat like a car or bicycle that starts to slide on the ice or mud. All of a sudden, it isn't on the road anymore, but it wasn't because the driver decided to leave the road. Rather, the tires started to slide a

little bit, and then a little bit more, and all of a sudden, the car or the bike has left the road.

That is how it is when someone leaves God. They don't decide to leave him, they just start to drift a little bit, and then all of a sudden, they find themselves a long ways away from God.

BIG IDEA

Our Sin Grows and Changes Us

God says in his Word, the Bible, that in the same way that tires can slide on mud or ice, our persistent sin is what makes us drift away. When we leave God, it is because we drift on our persistent sin.

The reason that our persistent sin takes us away from God is because our sin always grows, and as it grows, it always changes us.

Hebrews 3 12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

What this text is explaining, is that our sin grows and changes us. As God's child lives with persistent sin, he doesn't stay the same. His sin grows and at the same time, changes him.

SIN GROWS

When we evaluate our sin, we see how it is today. In any particular moment, my sin doesn't look that ugly. I can justify why I do it, and then I don't feel so guilty. I can compare myself with others who do worse things, and then I don't feel as bad. I can promise myself that I won't ever do it again, and then I won't be worried.

What we don't take into account is that, as long as we let a persistent sin reside in our lives, it always grows. The persistent sin never stays the same, it always grows and progresses.

It starts small

Part of the deceitfulness of sin that is mentioned in Hebrews 3.13 is that it always starts small. Think of a persistent sin that you have had, or maybe you still have. Isn't it true that when this first started in your life, it was very small?

For example, the man who has the persistent sin of explosive anger didn't start this sin by yelling at his kids or

beating them. This sin started by a little bit of frustration and impatience.

We think it isn't a big deal

When our sins are small we don't see them as being that bad. That is why no one thinks that their sins are a big deal when they are just starting out, for example, when they have a little bit of impatience, say little white lies or get in the habit of sharing a little bit of gossip.

Then they grow

Even though they start small, sin always grows. For example, a little bit of impatience will start to grow, little by little. Eventually, it won't be just a little bit of impatience, but it is anger and yelling, or maybe explosive rage and beatings.

Our persistent sin grows. It doesn't stay the same. It starts small, grows and all of a sudden is a habit. The persistent sins that are so difficult for us to stop, always start as small "character defects."

SIN CHANGES US

The persistent sin in our life doesn't just grow. While it is growing, sin changes us. Little by little, we become different people when we live with persistent sin, because sin changes us from the inside out.

Sin does something in us

We think that sin is something we do, acts we commit or words we say. While it is true that sin is something we do, what the Bible says is that sin does something inside of us. It isn't just actions that we commit. Rather, when we sin, our disobedience does a work inside of us and changes us.

Hebrews 3 12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Specifically, this passage says that sin works in two different ways inside of us:

1 - It deceives us

When we live in persistent sin, our sin deceives us. It lies to us. It changes the way we think.

Sin's deceit has two parts.

First, it deceives us because sinning, little by little, leads us to sin more. We all have done or said things in our lives that before, we thought we would never do or say. Why did we do things that we never thought we would do? Because sin

deceives us. It grows, but since it starts small and grows little by little, we don't realize where it is taking us, until it is too late.

Second, sin deceives us because it makes us think that things that truly are bad, really aren't that bad. As we continue in our persistent sin, all of a sudden we don't think it is as bad as we had thought at the beginning. We don't see it as being as repugnant as it really is.

Many times we have strong convictions about God, the Bible and moral principles, but when we tolerate constant sin in our life, little by little we change what we believed before about God and his will. All of a sudden, we don't believe what we believed before.

Sin deceives us.

2 - It hardens our heart

Sin changes our heart. If your heart is sensitive to God, if you feel bad when you disobey him, if your conscience bothers you when you sin, then your heart is soft towards God. You hear his voice and he guides you.

Sin hardens our heart. When we live with persistent sin, our heart becomes harder and harder, and we become rebellious. We laugh at sin. It doesn't repulse us like before. Our

conscience doesn't reproach us when we do something we shouldn't. It becomes easier and easier to sin more.

Sin hardens our heart towards God.

SIN MOVES US AWAY FROM GOD

When all is said and done, persistent sin separates us from God.

Someone starts out close to God. Later, they end up far away from him. Why? It is almost always the same story: Some small sins were allowed to grow and they changed the person, until now they don't feel anything for God and their heart is far away from him.

Hebrews 3 12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Our sin grows, changes us and separates us from God. We don't read the Bible, we don't pray and we stop going to church. God isn't at the center of our lives anymore.

Everyone is in danger

If you thought of someone else when I was describing this process of how sin grows and changes us, let me give you a warning: No one is immune. You could turn out like this. I could end up this way. Every person that today follows God, is in danger of starting to tolerate persistent sin and moving away from God.

IDENTIFY AND FIGHT AGAINST YOUR SIN

I want to finish this chapter by looking at God's solution to our problem with persistent sin. The solution is to continually inspect your life, identify your persistent sin and fight against that sin. This process protects us from persistent sin and its disastrous effects in our life.

INSPECT YOUR LIFE

We are able to see our persistent sin when we inspect our life. It is easy to hide our persistent sin, to not think too often about that part of our life and pretend, as much for ourselves as for others, that everything is alright.

God says that his children should be conscious of their sins.

1 John 1 6 *If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he*

is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Part of walking in the light, or with God, is knowing what our persistent sins are. We find out what our sins are when we inspect our life, and with honesty recognize our sins and disobedience.

Knowing his will

The key to be able to identify our persistent sin is to know the will of God. If we don't know what God wants from us, how can we know when we are disobeying him?

This is one of the reasons that it is so important to read the Bible daily, in order to know what God's will is. When we read, he makes us aware of the areas in our life that are not pleasing to him.

There is a specific section of the Bible that helps me greatly to see my persistent sin. It is found in Ephesians 4.17-5.20. Here, the writer describes many of God's commandments.

Every time I read this passage, it makes me aware of my persistent sin.

What persistent sin do I have?

The question that is most helpful in identifying our persistent sin is: What sin is in my life that I continually repeat? When I ask myself this question, God instantly makes me conscious of the persistent sin I have that is the most ingrained in my life.

FIGHT AGAINST PERSISTENT SIN

When we identify our persistent sin, God asks us to fight to remove this sin from our lives.

Galatians 5 16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

In other words, when we become aware of our sin, we have to leave it behind. The Bible describes this action of leaving our sin behind as a fight.

In Romans 7 and 8, God describes how his children should battle the sin they see in their lives.

The Spirit guides

We have to fight against our persistent sin, but we don't fight alone. God has put his Spirit inside of his children, and this Spirit helps us in the fight against our sin.

Romans 8 12 *Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

It is through the Spirit that we kill the sin that we have inside. He guides us in the middle of this struggle.

One way he guides us is through the Word of God. When we read the Bible, the Spirit guides us, he speaks to us, he makes us see our sin and the path to leaving it behind.

He also guides us in very practical ways, moment by moment as we live our lives. His guidance is what makes us think, for example, that it might be better to not answer the phone when that certain person calls, go to a certain place, go out with a particular person, say the words that you are thinking or do something you are about to do.

The Holy Spirit guides God's children continually as they fight to become more like Jesus.

Follow his guidance

God puts his Spirit inside of his children, and through him, guides them. He tells us what we should do, think and say. Our work in this fight is to follow the guidance of the Spirit.

Romans 8 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. 9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Following the Spirit's guidance means to pay attention when we read the Bible and see sin in our lives. It also means to obey the inner voice that guides us away from sin.

You will have victory

Many times, when we are fighting against a persistent sin, it feels like we will never be able to conquer it. We fight and fail. After struggling for a long time against the same sin, it is easy to think that we will always be that way, that this sin will always dominate us.

God promises his children victory over their persistent sin, when they follow the Spirit's guidance and fight against that sin.

Romans 8 10 *But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

This says that the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the grave. When he lives inside of you, this same power will give you victory over your persistent sin. This is an incredible promise!

There is no condemnation

There is another incredible promise at the beginning of this passage.

Romans 8 1 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*

While we fight against our sin, God says that he forgives us. As we fight and at times fail, our enemy Satan will try to make us feel like we aren't good children of God and that we will never overcome this sin. This is called condemnation.

God says here in this passage that he forgives his children as they fight against the persistent sin in their lives, even when they fail in that fight.

A NEVER-ENDING CYCLE

The process of inspecting your life in order to identify your persistent sin and fighting against that sin, is a never-ending cycle. As long as we live, we will always have persistent sin that we will have to identify and against which we will have to fight.

There is always something new. You will fight against a sin, maybe for a day or maybe for a year. Eventually you will have victory, and that sin will be something that "you used to do."

Later, as you inspect your life again, you will become aware of another sin. Once again you will fight, and as you follow the Spirit, you will have victory. Then the process will start over again, you will have to inspect your life, identify the persistent sin you have and fight against that sin.

WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?

Where are you in this process of inspecting your life and fighting against your persistent sin?

- What is your persistent sin?
- What is the sin that you are fighting today?
- How are you doing in the fight?

More like Jesus

The goal of the christian life isn't just to be a person who sins less, rather the goal is to be more like Jesus.

We aren't more holy in God's eyes when we leave sins behind. God only accepts us if we have entered into the forgiveness that Jesus offers.

Jesus is the only person who never sinned. He never committed a single sin during his entire life. He was the only perfect man to have ever lived. His perfect life, and undeserved death, give us entrance into forgiveness and peace with God

When we live continually looking for sin in our lives, in our attitudes, in the words we say, in our emotions, in how we treat others and in our habits, and when we fight to leave behind the sin that we find, we become more and more like Jesus. We will never be perfect, but every sin we leave behind takes us closer to the goal of becoming like Jesus.

4

WORKING WITH GOD

The habits we have looked at up until this point, living life close to God and recognizing and leaving sin, are both very inward habits. They have to do mainly with who we are and how we relate to God.

The last two habits we will look at are both outward-focused habits. They have to do mainly with how we relate to others. In spite of being outward-focused habits, they are two vital disciplines that lead us to become more and more like Jesus.

The first outward-focused habit is that of working with God.

Maybe you have never thought much about the possibility that you could work with God. Or maybe you spend a lot of time working alongside God. The reality is that God calls his children to work with him. When we work with our Father, we become more like Christ.

ATTEND AND RECEIVE

It is easy to think that life as a follower of Jesus is a life of attending and receiving. It is thinking that the most important activity in the life of a child of God is to attend services, meetings, studies and events that the church puts on. It is expecting that the greatest purpose that God's child has is to receive from God and from these events.

We do attend

A big part of being a child of God is spending time with other children of God. We will see the purpose of this in the next chapter. In the meantime, we can say that attending different meetings and services is such a big part of the life of God's child, that it becomes easy to think that the most important thing you can do in your Christian life is to attend these different events.

We receive a lot from God

We can start to think that the Christian life has to do with receiving from God. We think this for a very good reason, we do receive a lot from God. Because we are his sons and daughters and part of his family, the church, God does give us a lot. Some of the things that God promises his children are:

- Salvation from an eternity of punishment
- Forgiveness for our sins
- Peace in this life and peace with him
- Adoption into his family as his children
- Help with the problems of this life
- His Spirit inside of us

It is very true, when you get close to God, you receive from God. He doesn't promise that you will never have problems, or that he will give you everything you ask, but God does give very much to his children.

We think of church as a place where we receive

When we start to look at the christian life as a life of attending and receiving, the logical result is that we start to expect that the church is the place and the organization that

exists to give us what we need spiritually. It is thinking that the church exists principally to be a place where we receive.

We expect that:

- The services should minister to us.
- The leaders are there to help us.
- The members need to support us.
- Our friends should give us advice.

We attend and receive. We start to see the church as a place that is for me and exists to give me what I need, in the style I like.

When we don't receive what we need or want, in the way or the style that we like, we end up going to another church where we are better served, or we start to criticize the church where we are. You don't have to be around church for very long before you realize that there are many Christians that are dedicated to criticizing and demanding. This is because they have come to see the church as an organization that merely exists to please them, satisfy them and give them what they want.

SOMETHING MORE

Inside we know that being God's child and part of his family, the church, means more than merely attending and receiving. There has to be more to it than just being in a place that is comfortable for us. It can't just be a life of going to more meetings and services.

Looking for purpose

In large part, we feel this because we all look for purpose in our lives. When we decide to become children of God, something inside tells us that being God's son or daughter has to connect our little, tiny life with an enormous and meaningful purpose. We know that we aren't fulfilling this huge purpose when we reduce the Christian life to a life of attending and receiving.

God made us for a great purpose, and his desire is that every one of his children live a life full of purpose.

BIG IDEA

God saved you to work with him

God saved us in order to give us a new purpose. You could say that God's son or daughter has, along with his salvation, a

new purpose that should be the most important thing in his life. It is the new purpose of working with God.

He saves us by grace

Our tendency is to think and feel that we have to do good things in order to give back to God for having saved us. This is NOT true! It is incredibly important to emphasize that this habit of working with God isn't in order to pay him for our salvation, nor is it to earn our forgiveness, nor is it to deserve his love.

Ephesians 2 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

This clearly says that God saves his children by his grace, by his goodness, by his mercy. It isn't because of what we do or what we will do. Our salvation is a gift from God. So, working with him isn't related to earning our salvation.

He saves us to work

In this same passage in the Bible, God says that one of his huge purposes in saving us was so that we would work with him.

*Ephesians 2 10 For we are God's workmanship,
created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which
God prepared in advance for us to do.*

What this says is that God made us his children so that we could work with him. One of the purposes of our salvation is so that we would work with our Father. This verse says that the work that he has for each of his children is something he prepared especially for each one before-hand.

WHAT GOD WANTS IN THE WORLD

In order to understand the meaning of the work that God has for each of his children, we have to start by looking at the huge purpose that God has in this world.

God wants glory

God desires to receive glory from his creation. The reason he made us, the reason this planet exists, the reason you are alive, is that God wants to receive glory.

*Psalms 19 1 The heavens declare the glory of
God, and the sky above proclaims his
handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and
night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no
speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not
heard. 4 Their voice goes out through all the*

earth, and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

Isaiah 48 11 *For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.*

Glory is when we see God for how huge, good, powerful and sovereign that he is. Normally, people like you and I don't see God for how good and how powerful he really is. Since Adam and Eve, people have seen creation as being the biggest and most important thing. This is why Adam and Eve choose to eat the fruit over obeying God. This is why we see many other things, like sports, money, pleasure, entertainment and family, among others, as more important than God. We each put one or more of these things in the center of our lives, and in this way we make them bigger than God to us.

One of the ways that God helps us see him for how enormous and totally good he is, is by demonstrating his love by forgiving our sins.

Ephesians 1 5 *he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have*

redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Every time that God forgives someone, every time a person decides to enter into peace with God, God is seen as really powerful and really good, because he forgave someone who had lived a life in rebellion against him. The only appropriate reaction when someone is converted is to say: "God is extremely powerful and really, really good."

This is why God desires that everyone experience his salvation. Because through saving people, he reveals to everyone how good and how big he is. So, one of his purposes in this world is to save many people.

1 Timothy 2 4 {God} who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

God wants to save many people, like you and I, so that his great love and mercy are seen and recognized by everyone on earth.

Jesus' purpose

Jesus, the son of God, came to live as a man in this world with the same purpose that his Father has. He came to this

world with the purpose of making a way back to God for men and women who had rebelled against God.

Luke 19 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

During his life, he didn't just say that he was going to find and save people who were far from his Father, but that he was going to bring them together into his family, his church.

Matthew 16 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Jesus came to this world, started the work that even today is known as his church, and died innocently on the cross. He did all this for the purpose of saving people that were far away from his Father.

Following Jesus means working with him

Now, even though the meaning of being a "Christian" in our day has more to do with "attending and receiving," it wasn't always that way. Rather, Jesus' call to his followers wasn't "attend and receive," but "follow me and work with me." This was the original call that Jesus made when he called his first followers.

Mark 1 16 *As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.*

This wasn't just his call to them, it remains his call to everyone who wants to follow him. At the end of his time on this earth, just before ascending to heaven after his resurrection, he told his followers to go and make other followers from all of the peoples in all the nations.

Matthew 28 18 *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Part of his definition of someone who would be his disciple, or follower, was to "obey everything I have commanded you." The main thing that Jesus had taught his followers during his time with them was this idea of working with him. So, here he

is telling them, "go and help other people follow me, followers that will obey me in everything, including working with me like you have learned to do."

TO WORK WITH GOD MEANS TO HELP OTHERS KNOW GOD

If you are a child of God, then the work that your Father has given you to do is to help others get to where you are. It is helping the people in your life; people in your family, people that work with you, that go to school with you, that play with you on your sports teams, in other words your friends and family, to become children of God. The work is to help them be saved, to make their decision to turn to God, be baptized and enter the family of God and grow as children of God.

Our motivation

What motivates our work with God is the constant reality that many of the people that surround us are far from God. We know that their sin, or rebellion against God, separates them from God and destines them to an eternity of punishment far from God.

Our message

In the middle of this world, God has given us the message that his son Jesus offers everyone a path to be able to be at peace with God. When we think of the people around us that don't have peace with God, we know that they will only receive

forgiveness and peace with God if they make a decision to enter into peace with God.

Matthew 28 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

HOW WE WORK WITH JESUS

There are three main ways that we work with Jesus:

1 – Friendships with a purpose

We work with Jesus when we share genuine friendships, with a purpose, with people who are far from God. We work with the people that God has put in our lives. You aren't where you are today by accident. God has put you on purpose in the job where you are, in the house or apartment where you live, in the family that you were born into and on the sports team you play with. He has surrounded you with other people in these environments on purpose. The purpose is that he wants you to help these people find peace with God.

The main way that we bring peace with God to the people who are around us is by sharing genuine friendship, but friendship with a purpose, with every person that God puts in our path. God's children should be the friendliest people on earth. The friendship that we share with others isn't a fake friendship just to "get them baptized," but rather a sincerely genuine friendship.

We don't have friendships with people who aren't Christians just to get them to make a decision and enter into peace with God. At the same time, we have a great burden for their soul and their relationship with God. So, our friendship is genuine, but we also have a purpose in our friendship, we want to see them enter into peace with God.

We work with Jesus when we spend time with people who don't have peace with God, when we share our lives and form genuine friendships with them, when we are always praying for our friends that aren't God's children and when we look for opportunities to share a study with them that explains how to have peace with God, like "I Want Peace with God."

2 – Guide other Christians

We also work with people who have already made their decision to enter into peace with God. We guide them as they are maturing in their relationship with God. The reason that

this is important is because the Bible describes the life of a follower of Jesus as a life of constant progress and continual changes.

When Jesus chose 12 men, and spent his three years of ministry working with them, helping them to mature, he left us with a model of how his followers should work with those who have decided to follow him together with us.

We work with Jesus when we spend time with other people who are sons and daughters of God, in order to help them know God better, leave sin in their lives and live like Jesus lived. For this reason we meet with other Christians and guide them by:

- Studying the Bible together.
- Reading studies (like this one) together.
- Spending time together sharing life.
- Asking each other "how are things in your life?"
- Giving words of encouragement when they are needed.
- Lovingly correcting sin and wrong attitudes.

3 – The church's projects

We also work with Jesus when we work with our church's projects. Your local church is your christian family. We will talk more about this in the next chapter, but here we have to mention that the local church is the context that God has chosen to use to promote his message. So, as we work together in the church, we can do much more together than if we work by ourselves.

Every church has events and projects that it uses to attract people who are far from God and to mature people who have already entered into peace with God. Aside from the meetings and services that every church has, some also do studies in jails, share with the poor and do personal Bible studies, among many other projects.

We work with Jesus when we unite with his family, the church, and together work to put on meetings and services, to invite our friends to these events and collaborate with the other projects of the church.

JESUS' FOLLOWERS DEDICATE THEIR LIVES TO THIS WORK

The reality is that most of the people who live around us are on a path to spend their eternity far from God in torment and punishment. God asks his children to work together with him to bring salvation to these people.

That is why, in his Word, God repeatedly encourages his children to dedicate their lives to help others know God.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

More and more

In this passage we discover the idea that God's child should seek to work more and more with God. This doesn't mean helping with something at church or inviting someone to church and then saying, "now I have met my duty of working with God." Rather, God wants his followers to always ask the question, "How can I work with God more?"

Persistently

Many times when we invite someone, or we serve another or we try to study with a person in our lives, we don't see, in the moment, the results of our work. It appears that they aren't any closer to God.

When we work and don't see results, we can feel like it isn't working. We feel discouraged. God wants his children to

work with him, and he takes responsibility for the results of our work.

So, we should work persistently. We invite, study, offer friendship and organize meetings and services. God is the one who produces the results from our work.

Working with Jesus

The most encouraging part of this verse is the phrase "*your labor in the Lord.*" What it is saying is that when we work to bring the people in our life closer to God, we are literally working with Jesus. It isn't something that we do by ourselves. Rather, it is a work that he is doing, and he invites us to participate in this mission with him.

Not in vain

Since we are working with Jesus, it also says that our work isn't in vain. This is true even when we don't see results. Every time you setup chairs at church, invite a friend to church, study with a relative, give food to a neighbor or pray for someone at work, you are working with Jesus and helping them to take steps towards God. This work is never in vain.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?

What is the next step you can take to work more with Jesus?

Church projects

How can you work more in your church?

- What are some of your church's projects?
- What are some of the different meetings or services at your church?

How can you work more in your church? If you don't know where to start, the best way to take the first step is to ask the leaders, "How can I help?"

People far from God

Who are the people in your life who are far from God? Who are the people in your family, school, work, sports team and group of friends that in this moment don't have peace with God? How can you help them to know Jesus?

Here are some ideas:

- Invite them to go to church with you.
- Ask them if they want to study "I Want Peace with God" with you.
- Spend time this week with one of these people (get a coffee together, visit them or help them at work).
- Pray every day for one of these people.

Other Christians

Who are the Christians that God has put in your life that you could help to mature? Who are the people that have already made their decision to enter into peace with God that are around you? There are probably one or two people that you could help to grow and mature in their faith. How can you help these people develop their faith and their relationship with God?

Here are some ideas:

- Study every week for a month with one of them (you could use a study like this one or just read a book of the Bible together).
- Invite them to your house to eat.
- Spend time with that person.

More like Jesus

Remember, the goal of the life of God's child isn't just to work, the goal is to become more like Jesus.

Jesus dedicated his life to the work of his Father, God. When we dedicate our lives to doing the work of God here on earth, we become more like Jesus.

5

LIVING AS FAMILY

The last essential habit in the life of a Christ-follower that we will look at is the habit of living as family with God's other children. It is sharing life in authentic community with other people who are also God's children.

Many times it is neither common nor easy for Christians to live together in true community. There is a couple of reasons why this is:

1 - SOME LIVE ISOLATED LIVES

Some tend to live their lives a bit isolated from other people. Of course, they are almost constantly surrounded by other people during their whole life; at work, in the stores, when they go to the movies, when they go to the park. In spite of being surrounded by other people, they tend to live isolated lives. In other words, many times they don't live in authentic community with others.

We enter into a relationship with God

Many times, this tendency to live lives constantly surrounded by other people, but in reality isolated from them, continues even after making the decision to become a child of God.

We enter into a relationship with God, but not with his family. We are children of God, but we don't live like brothers and sisters with God's other children. We receive forgiveness, but our relationship with God is defined by our relationship between him and us, and not as much by our relationship with his family.

2 - NEW CHRISTIAN, OLD COMMUNITY

For others, the situation is a bit different. They live in community with others, but when they become a child of God,

the group of people they are in community with doesn't change. They might go to church on Sunday, but during the rest of their week, they live, work, play, study and share with the same friends as before.

Of course, God's child should NOT just leave all of his old relationships. Jesus taught that his followers should be light in the middle of darkness. In other words, God's child should have friendships with people who aren't Christians.

However, when someone becomes God's child, her best friends, the people closest to her, logically should be other children of God. That way, together they can help each other know God better, leave sin behind and work with Jesus. That is the meaning of living in new community.

Without being in community with his children, we drift away from God

The reason that it is so important to live in community with the other children of God, is because living in community with God's other children protects us in our relationship with God.

There is a relationship between being in community with other children of God, and living a life that is faithful to God. Maybe you have seen or experienced this in your life; when you are by yourself, not living in community with other children of God, you start to drift away from God.

When we are isolated, when we come to church on Sundays but we aren't in community with other Christians, we naturally drift away from God little by little. Sometimes it starts by not reading the Bible like we did before. Other times, new sins start to enter into our lives. Other times, we slowly stop work that we are doing with Jesus.

It isn't a coincidence that the people who have the strongest relationship with God, who are successfully leaving behind their sins and who work the hardest in the kingdom, are the people who live in authentic community with other children of God.

WE NEED COMMUNITY

So, the reality is that God's child needs to live in community with God's other children. The life of a Christ follower isn't an isolated life.

Sunday's service isn't enough

In order to live in community with God's other children, merely attending the Sunday meeting isn't enough. We are in community with the people we frequently see and with whom we frequently talk. Just one meeting a week doesn't take us into living in community with other children of God.

Much more

Living in authentic community with God's other children means much more than only seeing each other occasionally in a formal meeting. Of course, Sunday's meeting is an incredibly important part of the believers' community, but being part of this community means much more than just attending this meeting.

BIG IDEA

Being God's child means being part of his family

God states and demonstrates repeatedly in his Word that when someone decides to be his child, he becomes part of his family. He or she becomes a member of the community of all the other children of God.

1 Peter 2 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Corinthians 12 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

So, by definition, you can't be God's child without also being a brother or sister to the rest of God's children.

The family of God

The idea of living in community with the rest of God's children comes from the real-life example of how people who are brothers and sisters live together. Ideally, brothers and sisters in this life share a unique friendship and bond. Every family isn't like this, but you expect a family to be very united and essentially a small community.

In the same way, because we are sons and daughters of the same Father, God, we are part of the same family. The friendship and bond that God's children share should be much more real and stronger than the bond and friendship that siblings share.

A shared life

In the Bible, we encounter a description of the community and bond that the spiritual family of Jesus' first followers shared. The description is of a life shared with other children of God. By seeing how they lived as a family, we can learn how we, today, should live as the family of God.

Acts 2 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. (44) All the believers were together

and had everything in common. (45) Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. (46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (47) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In this description of the first christian community, we see what the family of God should be like, how we should live as God's family and what happens when we do live as God's family.

WHAT SHOULD THE FAMILY OF GOD BE LIKE?

God says that his children are members of his family. So, our question is, "what should this family be like?"

Let's take a look at some of the characteristics that should identify God's family.

A united family

The first characteristic of God's family is that it is a united family. It isn't just a group of people, rather, it is a family. Its unity is expressed in companionship and a deep, brotherly love.

(44) All the believers were together

The first Christians were like a united family. They shared their lives with each other.

Living with this kind of unity means that the closest friendships that God's children have should be with other children of God. It is an understanding that now, since we are God's children, we are more than friends with each other, we are in fact related spiritually.

Unity should be one of the dominant characteristics of God's family.

Mutual care

Another characteristic of God's family should be mutual care for each other. This should be the place where no one has need, and everyone shares the need that anyone else has.

(44) All the believers were together and had everything in common. (45) Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

In the early church, they helped each other. Each person's need became everyone's need. It wasn't a community where some took advantage of this, but rather it was a community

where the true needs of everyone were carried by the community as they helped each other.

When the first characteristic, unity, exists in a group of Christ followers, that unity is naturally expressed in a mutual care of each member of the community.

Bringing glory to God

Up until this point, what we have been describing are characteristics that could be seen in any united family. What distinguishes God's family from every other family, is the propose of the members of this family.

God's family has as its principal goal that of bringing glory to God. In other words, the family of God exists not so much to be united and take care of each other, as to make God look big, strong and good in the eyes of every person who observes this family.

This was the purpose of the first Christians:

(47) praising God

Together they sang, prayed, read the Bible and talked about God. It was a community focused on Jesus and God.

Today, it should be the same for us. God's family should be a community in which everyone helps each other put God in the center of their heart. The focus of our community and

communion as God's family should be to bring glory to God, or to make God be seen to everyone around us as big, strong and good.

So, the family of God continually says together, through song, in teaching, in private counseling and in conversations: "God is most important - put him at the center of your life."

HOW WE SHOULD LIVE AS GOD'S FAMILY?

If the family of God should be characterized by its unity, its mutual care and by glorifying God together, then we have to ask ourselves, "what does this look like in practical terms?"

How should we live as God's family?

The same description of the first church in Acts 2 doesn't just describe the characteristics of how the church was, but it also describes what its daily life as a family was like. In this description, we can see how we should live as part of God's family.

Regular meetings

A big part of the family life of God's family is the church's regular meetings. These are moments when everyone, or almost everyone, comes together in a single place to celebrate a worship service to God.

This was the practice of the first church:

(46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

A huge part of their community was their public meetings. This meeting can be compared today to our Sunday meeting where we sing to God, teach and preach his Word and invite our friends to come and see what life as a Christian is all about.

In this meeting, we focus together on God, and as his children, we put him once again at the center of our lives. This focus can be seen in our activities during this meeting:

- We remember the death of Jesus with the Lord's Supper.
- We receive the Word of God.
- We sing to God together.
- We invite outsiders to come to this meeting in order to see our faith publicly expressed.

Living life together

After mentioning the big meetings that they had, the text continues by describing how Jesus' first followers spent time together outside of the church's big meeting.

(46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their

homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

What this describes is that another huge part of the community they shared was through smaller meetings, or groups getting together in each other's houses. They ate together, possibly remembered Jesus by taking the Lord's Supper together and shared life as family.

Today, this can be compared with community groups, small groups or cell groups that meet at formally set times.

It can also be compared with the times that different Christians spend time together informally. Living as family means spending time together, not just in the activities programmed by the church, but also in the normal activities of life, like:

- When two or three families from church eat together.
- When a few people go out shopping together.
- When a group gets together to play a sport or watch a sport on TV.
- When a family stops by to visit another family in their home.

In order to live as God's family, we have to spend time together. You can't be best friends with every person that goes to your church, but you should spend time regularly with some of them. Even though our social life shouldn't be limited to just spending time with other sons and daughters of God, a large part of the christian life is spending time with other Christ followers.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DO LIVE AS GOD'S FAMILY?

The description of the early church in Acts 2 concludes by describing what happened when they lived in this way. I believe this description ends like this because the same thing can happen today when we, as God's children, live as a family.

Recognized by outsiders

The Bible says that the first Christ followers were recognized with favor by those outside the family:

(47) and enjoying the favor of all the people.

They treated people who weren't Christians well, they didn't separate themselves from them. Rather, they lived among them in such a way that they made being God's child and part of this community attractive to outsiders.

If we live in the community that God desires for his children, others will see this and value it, because it is not

normal for people from different families, races and cultures to join together as family. We will enjoy favor among outsiders because we are literally transformed together into Christ's body, and together are his representation to the world.

Always growing

The product of living as family with other children of God is that this family attracts other people that want to be part of God's family.

*(47) And the Lord added to their number daily
those who were being saved.*

Their purpose wasn't just to be together, praise God and protect themselves from the world. God used them, together, to attract, teach and baptize other people that were in their lives. Their purpose as a community wasn't just to benefit themselves, but to help others know God. Because of this, every day there were baptisms, every day co-workers, family and friends said "I want to become a child of God too and become part of your community."

They helped each other physically and spiritually, and they sought God together. When others saw this, they wanted it as well. Together, we make what it means to have peace with God and live as God's children visible and real to others.

We help each other follow Christ

Living in community with other Christians is the essential ingredient to being able to live the christian life and not leave the faith, not fall into sin, make wise decisions and find encouragement in difficult moments.

Hebrews 10 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (25) Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

What we receive when we live in community with other children of our Father is invaluable:

- We give and receive advice when we don't know which decision to make.
- We encourage each other when we feel sad and down.
- We comfort each other when we pass through difficult moments.
- We help each other when we have need.
- We correct each other when we see someone starting down a bad path.

- We confess our sins to each other.
- We pray for each other.
- We encourage each other in our faith (to read the Bible, to continue on, to work more with God and to pray).
- We confront each other when we see sin in our lives.

We help each other mutually serve God, live like Jesus and help other people know God.

For this reason, when we spend time together, we should always be thinking of how we can help each other follow Christ better. This doesn't mean only talking about God or the Bible, but it does mean to always have the goal that, during the time we spend together, we will help each other in our walk with God.

One of the biggest questions that we can ask each other when we are together is simply: "How are you doing with God?" This question opens the door to many opportunities to encourage each other.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?

If we, the children of God, are a family, then the question we must ask is, "How can I live in deeper community with other children of God?"

For some, this means making a commitment to start regularly attending the church's meetings on Sunday. If this isn't your habit, your next step should be to incorporate this habit into your life. The weekly meeting of the whole church is a very important event in a Christian's life.

For others, you need to spend more time with your christian brothers and sisters during the week. You attend on Sundays, and then disappear until the next Sunday. You aren't living in community with your family. You need to invite other Christ-followers into your house during the week, to eat and talk. You need to join a small group, community group or Bible study. You need to spend more time with your christian friends.

We all need to share our lives more with other children of God.

- Who is in your life that you can help in their walk with God?
- Who do you know that has needs, that you can help?

- How can you encourage someone else in their faith?

What is your next step to live in deeper community with others who are also God's children?

More like Jesus

The goal of the christian life is to become more like Jesus.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is in perfect communion with his Father God, and with God the Spirit. Additionally, Jesus lived in community with his followers during his life on earth.

When we live in deeper community with other followers of Jesus, we become more like Jesus. Being in community demonstrates to the world the communion that God desires to have with us, and being in community helps us to mature and become more like Jesus.

MY NEXT STEP STUDY GUIDE

The My Next Step Study Guide presents the material from the book in a format that can be used as a small group, study group or cell group curriculum, or as a study guide for discipleship groups.

HOW TO USE THE STUDY

The study for one lesson or chapter of My Next Step normally lasts between one half hour to one hour. How long

the study lasts depends on how much discussion is generated by the introduction and application questions.

Preparation

Before the group meets, all of the participants should read the chapter of My Next Step that they will be discussing during the study. However, this shouldn't be a prerequisite to being able to participate in the study.

Big Idea

The Big Idea is an extremely concise summary of the chapter's main idea.

Start the study by simply reading the Big Idea out loud. This serves to establish the topic for the rest of the conversation or study.

Discussion

There are one or two questions that help to start to think about how the study's topic relates to our practical life.

The goal of this portion of the study is to generate discussion and conversation around the topic.

Chapter Summary

The Chapter Summary contains a brief explanation of the material that is taught in the chapter. In this part of the study,

you can read this out loud, alternating readers with each new paragraph.

This serves to provide an overview of the topic to everyone who is participating in the study, both those who read the chapter beforehand and those who didn't read it.

Application

The study concludes with an application question. This question should be read out loud and everyone should share their different answers to the question. In this section of the study, we want to focus our attention in how to apply the chapter's main idea to our lives in practical ways.

Study 1

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

Big Idea

Many times we act as if being God's son or daughter means to be a good person and go to church. The truth is that God wants his children to live a life of continual transformation as they become more and more like Jesus.

Discussion

- Can you explain briefly what you think it means to live as a Christian?

Chapter Summary

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

There is an interesting phenomenon that exists in churches today. We tend to put a lot of emphasis on making the initial decision to become God's child, and rightly so. Life as God's child starts by coming to faith in Jesus, by deciding to repent and by being baptized. At times however, we don't explain how to live as a child of God after making those decisions.

It is like saying, "Now that you are baptized, just keep coming to church each week and live a good life." I don't know about you, but that sounds really boring. Following Christ has to be more than that!

GOD WANTS HIS CHILDREN TO BECOME MORE AND MORE LIKE JESUS

The goal of following Christ is to become like Christ.

1 John 2 6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

God says that if we are his children, we have to become like Jesus, imitate Jesus, treat other people the way Jesus treated others, live close to God like Jesus did and work for God like Jesus worked for his Father.

Constant progress

The Bible teaches that all of God's children should live in a state of constant progress in their lives. We are to progressively allow God to change us. In the words of the apostle Paul, being a child of God means living a life that is always changing and becoming more like Jesus.

Philippians 3 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

HOW CAN WE CHANGE TO BECOME MORE LIKE CHRIST?

The good news is that in the Bible, God tells us how to live this life of constant changes that he expects from his children.

1 - God changes us

The Bible teaches that being more and more like Christ is a product of being a child of God. The Bible explains it like this:

by entering into peace with God, He makes you His child and then He changes you.

Philippians 1 *3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

The Spirit of God lives inside of each child of God, and the Spirit is continually changing him to become more and more like Jesus. The Bible says that the Spirit in us produces a transformation within us.

Galatians 5 *22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.*

The Spirit of God literally changes God's children, from the inside out.

2 - Our habits change us

Practically speaking, what the Spirit of God uses to change us are habits that lead us to change. They are habits that put us in a place where God changes us. As we learn to live with

these habits in our lives, God changes us to become more like Christ.

*Colossians 2 6 Therefore, as you received Christ
Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,*

"My Next Step" explains the habits that lead to change

In this book, we will learn four practices that will lead us to become more like Jesus. These four disciplines create an environment in us through which God can keep maturing us and changing us.

Application

- In your life, would you say you have the tendency to think that being a Christian means going to church and being a good person?
- When you think of the changes that God desires to see in you, do you expect God to change you or do you think more about how your habits change you?

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Study 2

LIVING CLOSE TO GOD

Big Idea

We tend to share some moments in our lives with God, but he isn't part of every moment of our lives. The truth is that God wants to be close to his children always. We live close to him when we listen to his voice and talk to him throughout our day.

Discussion

- What are some of the times in your day when you are "with God"?

Chapter Summary

Many times we think that following Christ or being a child of God has to do with making a decision and then being a good person. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The big idea of this book is that God wants his sons and daughters to become more and more like Christ. Jesus is our example, and by living life as his followers, we should become more and more like him.

There are various disciplines, or habits, that as they become part of our lives, naturally lead us to become more and more like Jesus. The goal of this book is to help us to integrate these habits into our lives.

The first habit that leads us to become more like Jesus is that of living close to God. However, what we know about life is that living close to God doesn't come naturally to us.

WE WANT A LITTLE BIT OF GOD

Everyone wants a little bit of God. Even the hardest criminal wears a cross on his chain. We all want to have God in our lives.

However, at the same time, we don't want to lose control of our life. If God wants to be part of our life, we want to define what that relationship will look like.

We let him into our life, but not into our whole life. We have compartments for God, well-defined places and moments where we are "with God."

We don't share our life with him

In spite of the fact that we include God in different parts of our life, the reality is that God isn't in every part of our lives.

GOD WANTS TO BE NEAR

God wants to be near to his children. In the entire Bible, one theme that is repeated over and over again is that of God wanting to share life with his children. What God really desires is a relationship of Father and child with us.

2 Corinthians 6 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

***YOU SHARE YOUR LIFE WITH GOD WHEN YOU TALK WITH HIM
AND LISTEN TO HIM***

The way that we really share our lives with God, instead of just having him be present in a few specific moments, is by talking with him and listening to him throughout the day.

You listen to his voice when you read the Bible

Even though it sounds weird, God says that through the Bible, he literally talks to us. He communicates his words to us, not with an audible voice, but through the written words.

2 Timothy 3 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The reality is that God talks today with us through these words that he previously inspired.

Hebrews 4 12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything

*is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of
him to whom we must give account.*

When you read the Bible, God talks to you. Every time you open the Bible and read, even if it is only for a few minutes, God talks to you. Every time you read, you are letting God come into your life.

You talk to him when you pray

You share your life with God when you hear his voice in his Word. You also share your life with God when you talk with him, or when you pray.

Praying is much more than just repeating formal prayers that you sometimes hear in churches. Prayer is nothing more than talking to God. Prayer is your conversation with God.

True prayer is simply talking to God. You can talk to God using your own words, just like when you talk to your friends.

A new habit

If we are going to share our lives with God, we have to read and pray during our day. It is good to read and pray in the morning before starting the day. However, this doesn't automatically involve God in the rest of our life.

So then, to involve God in your whole life, you have to find moments during the day in which you can read the Bible. In

the morning, before going to bed, over lunch or whenever. It doesn't have to be hours and hours of study, it can just be reading a paragraph and then thinking about what you read.

As far as prayer goes, the goal of God's child should be to maintain a constant conversation with God during the entire day. That is, in your mind always be talking with him.

Application

- What is your next step to spend more time each day with God?
- Do you have a specific time and place where you spend time with God every day?
- Are you in the habit of reading and praying at night before going to bed?
- Do you read and pray in the morning before starting your day?
- Is there a book of the Bible that you are reading through?
- What change will you make this week to spend more time with God?

Study 3

LEAVING SIN

Big Idea

We think that sins are things we do. The reality is that the persistent sins we have actually do something inside of us. These sins grow, they change us and eventually they can separate us from God.

Discussion

- What do you think about the sin in your life?

- Do you have the tendency to minimize your sin, to not think of it as being a huge deal, to think you really don't do that many bad things?
- Or do you have the tendency to be very conscious of each sin you commit and to feel very guilty when you sin?

Chapter Summary

The second habit that leads us to become more and more like Jesus is that of recognizing and leaving our sin. It is the discipline of continually analyzing our life to be able to see the sin that enters into our character, fight against that sin and work to leave it behind.

Our sin

The biblical definition of sin is to "disobey God." We sin when we do something that God has prohibited, or when we don't do something that God has asked us to do.

The reality is that every person has persistent sins. A persistent sin is when we sin in the same way, doing the same thing, over and over again. It is an area of our life in which we know that we aren't pleasing God. It is a habitual sin.

All sin, all disobedience to God, is a great offense against our Creator. However, persistent sin is extremely dangerous. It is much more dangerous than the isolated sins that we commit from time to time. Let me say again that all sin is bad, I don't want to minimize a single sin, however persistent sin is the most dangerous sin of all.

OUR SIN GROWS AND CHANGES US

The reason that our persistent sin is dangerous is because our sin always grows, and as it grows, it always changes us.

Hebrews 3 12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Sin grows

What we don't take into account is that, as long as we let a persistent sin reside in our lives, it always grows. The persistent sin never stays the same, it always grows and progresses.

When our sins are small we don't see them as being that bad. That is why no one thinks that their sins are a big deal

when they are just starting out, for example, when they have a little bit of impatience, say little white lies or get in the habit of sharing a little bit of gossip.

Our persistent sin grows. It doesn't stay the same. It starts small, grows and all of a sudden is a habit. The persistent sins that are so difficult for us to stop, always start as small "character defects."

Sin changes us

The persistent sin in our life doesn't just grow. While it is growing, sin changes us. Little by little, we become different people when we live with persistent sin, because sin changes us from the inside out.

When we live in persistent sin, our sin deceives us. It lies to us. It changes the way we think.

It deceives us because sinning, little by little, leads us to sin more. We all have done or said things in our lives that before, we thought we would never do or say. Why did we do things that we never thought we would do? Because sin deceives us. It grows, but since it starts small and grows little by little, we don't realize where it is taking us, until it is too late.

Sin also deceives us because it makes us think that things that truly are bad, really aren't that bad. As we continue in our persistent sin, all of a sudden we don't think it is as bad as we

had thought at the beginning. We don't see it as being as repugnant as it really is.

While sin is deceiving us, it is also hardening our heart. When we live with persistent sin, our heart becomes harder and harder, and we become rebellious. We laugh at sin. It doesn't repulse us like before. Our conscience doesn't reproach us when we do something we shouldn't. It becomes easier and easier to sin more.

Sin moves us away from God

When all is said and done, persistent sin separates us from God. Someone starts out close to God. Later, they end up far away from him. Why? It is almost always the same story: Some small sins were allowed to grow and they changed the person, until now they don't feel anything for God and their heart is far away from him.

IDENTIFY AND FIGHT AGAINST YOUR SIN

We are able to see our persistent sin when we inspect our life. It is easy to hide our persistent sin, to not think too often about that part of our life and pretend, as much for ourselves as for others, that everything is alright.

When we identify our persistent sin, God asks us to fight to remove this sin from our lives. In other words, when we

become aware of our sin, we have to leave it behind. The Bible describes this action of leaving our sin behind as a fight.

We have to fight against our persistent sin, but we don't fight alone. God has put his Spirit inside of his children, and this Spirit helps us in the fight against our sin.

Our work in this fight is to follow the guidance of the Spirit. Following the Spirit's guidance means to pay attention when we read the Bible and see sin in our lives. It is obeying the inner voice that guides us away from sin.

You will have victory

God promises his children victory over their persistent sin, when they follow the Spirit's guidance and fight against that sin.

While we fight against our sin, God says that he forgives us. As we fight and at times fail, our enemy Satan will try to make us feel like we aren't a good children of God and that we will never overcome this sin. This is called condemnation.

God says that he forgives his children as they fight against the persistent sin in their lives, even when they fail in that fight.

A never-ending cycle

The process of inspecting your life in order to identify your persistent sin and fighting against that sin, is a never-ending

cycle. As long as we live, we will always have persistent sin that we will have to identify and against which we will have to fight.

Application

- Where are you in this process of inspecting your life and fighting against your persistent sin?
- What is your persistent sin?
- What is the sin that you are fighting today?
- How are you doing in the fight?
- What do you need to do to leave this sin behind?

Study 4

WORKING WITH GOD

Big Idea

We have the tendency to think that the Christian life is focused on going to events (services or meetings at church), and receiving (information, help and advice) from the church's different programs and ministries. The reality is that God asks his children to work with him.

Discussion

- What does it mean to work with God?

- How important is it to work with God? Why?

Chapter Summary

ATTEND AND RECEIVE

It is easy to think that life as a follower of Jesus is a life of attending and receiving. It is thinking that the most important activity in the life of a child of God is to attend services, meetings, studies and events that the church puts on. It is expecting that the greatest purpose that God's child has is to receive from God and from these events.

We do attend

A big part of being a child of God is spending time with other children of God. We will see the purpose of this in the next chapter. In the meantime, we can say that attending different meetings and services is a such a big part of the life of God's child, that it becomes easy to think that the most important thing you can do in your Christian life is to attend these different events.

Inside we know that being God's child and part of his family, the church, means more than merely attending and receiving. There has to be more to it than just being in a place that is comfortable for us. It can't just be a life of going to more meetings and services.

God made us for a great purpose, and his desire is that every one of his children live a life full of purpose.

GOD SAVED YOU TO WORK WITH HIM

God saved us in order to give us a new purpose. You could say that God's son or daughter has, along with his salvation, a new purpose that should be the most important thing in his life. It is the new purpose of working with God.

He saves us by grace

Our tendency is to think and feel that we have to do good things in order to give back to God for our salvation. This is NOT true! It is incredibly important to emphasize that this habit of working with God isn't in order to pay him for our salvation, nor is it to earn our forgiveness, nor is it to deserve his love.

Ephesians 2 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

He saves us to work

In this same passage in the Bible, God says that one of his huge purposes in saving us was so that we would work with him.

Ephesians 2 10 *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Following Jesus means working with him

Now, even though the meaning of being a "Christian" in our day has more to do with "attending and receiving," it wasn't always that way. Rather, Jesus' call to his followers wasn't "attend and receive," but "follow me and work with me." This was the original call that Jesus made when he called his first followers.

This wasn't just his call to them, it remains his call to everyone who wants to follow him. At the end of his time on this earth, just before ascending to heaven after his resurrection, he told his followers to go and make other followers from all of the peoples in all the nations.

Matthew 28 18 *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

HOW WE WORK WITH JESUS

If you are a child of God, then the work that your Father has given you to do is to help others get to where you are. It is helping the people in your life; people in your family, people that work with you, that go to school with you, that play with you on your sports teams, in other words your friends and family, to become children of God. The work is to help them be saved, to make their decision to turn to God, be baptized and enter the family of God.

1 – Friendships with a purpose

We share genuine friendships with a purpose with people who are far from God. We work with the people that God has put in our lives. You aren't where you are today by accident. God has put you on purpose in the job where you are, in the house or apartment where you live, in the family that you were born into and on the sports team you play with. He has surrounded you with other people in these environments on purpose. The purpose is that he wants you to help these people find peace with God.

We work with Jesus when we spend time with people who don't have peace with God, when we share our lives and form genuine friendships with them, when we are always praying for

our friends that aren't God's children and when we look for opportunities to share a study with them that explains how to have peace with God, like the study "I Want Peace with God."

2 – Guide other Christians

We also work with people who have already made their decision to enter into peace with God. The reason that this is important is because the Bible describes the life of a follower of Jesus as a life of constant progress and continual changes.

We work with Jesus when we spend time with other people who are sons and daughters of God, in order to help them know God better, leave sin in their lives and live like Jesus lived. For this reason we meet with other Christians and guide them by studying the Bible and sharing our lives together.

3 - The church's projects

We work with Jesus when we unite with his family, the church, and together work to put on the meetings and services, to invite our friends to these events and collaborate with the other projects of the church.

Application

What is the next step you can take to work more with Jesus?

How can you work more in your church?

- What are some of your church's projects?

- What are some of the different meetings or services at your church?
- How can you help more?

Who are the people in your life who are far from God?

- How can you help them to know Jesus?

Who are the Christians that God has put in your life that you could help to mature?

- How can you help these people to develop their faith and their relationship with God?

What will you do this week to work with Jesus more?

Study 5

LIVING AS FAMILY

Big Idea

Many times it is neither common nor easy for Christians to live together in true community. God says that being his child means to live life in community, as family, with his other children.

Discussion

- What does it mean to live in community with other Christians?

- Can you describe a time in your life when you lived in community with other Christians?

Chapter Summary

The last essential habit in the life of a Christ-follower that we will look at is the habit of living as family with God's other children. It is sharing life in authentic community with other people that are also God's children.

Many times we enter into a relationship with God, but not with his family. We are children of God, but we don't live like brothers and sisters with God's other children. We receive forgiveness, but our relationship with God is defined more by our relationship between him and us, and not as much by our relationship with his family.

The reason that it is so important to live in community with the other children of God, is because living in community with God's other children protects us in our relationship with God.

There is a relationship between being in community with other children of God, and living a life that is faithful to God. Maybe you have seen or experienced this in your life, when you are by yourself, not living in community with other children of God, you start to drift away from God.

Living in authentic community with God's other children means much more than only seeing each other occasionally in a formal meeting. Of course, the Sunday meeting is an incredibly important part of the believers' community, but being part of this community means much more than just attending this meeting.

BEING GOD'S CHILD MEANS BEING PART OF HIS FAMILY

God says and demonstrates repeatedly in his Word that when someone decides to be his child, he becomes part of his family. He or she becomes a member of the community of all the other children of God.

*1Peter 2 10 Once you were not a people, but now
you are the people of God; {...}*

*1Corinthians 12 27 Now you are the body of
Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

A shared life

In the Bible, we encounter a description of the community and bond that the spiritual family of Jesus' first followers shared. The description is of a life shared with other children of God. By seeing how they lived as a family, we can learn how we, today, should live as the family of God.

Acts 2 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. (44) All the believers were together and had everything in common. (45) Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. (46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (47) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

What should the family of God be like?

The first characteristic of God's family is that it is a united family. It isn't just a group of people, rather, it is a family. Its unity is expressed in companionship and a deep, brotherly love.

Another characteristic of God's family should be mutual care for each other. This should be the place where no one has need, and everyone shares the need that anyone has.

God's family has as its principal goal that of bringing glory to God. In other words, the family of God exists not so much to be united and take care of each other, but to make God look

big, strong and good in the eyes of every person who observes this family.

How we should live as God's family?

A big part of the family life of God's family is the church's regular meetings. These are moments when everyone, or almost everyone, comes together in a single place to celebrate a worship service to God.

In order to live as God's family, we have to spend time together outside of the church's big meetings. You can't be best friends with every person that goes to your church, but you should spend time regularly with some of them. Even though our social life shouldn't be limited to just spending time with other sons and daughters of God, a large part of the christian life is spending time with other Christ followers.

What happens when we do live as God's family?

If we live in the community that God desires for his children, others will see this and value it, because it is not normal for people from different families, races and cultures to join together as family. We will enjoy favor among outsiders because we literally are transformed together into Christ's body, and together are his representation to the world.

The product of living as family with other children of God, is that this family attracts other people that want to be part of God's family.

Also, living in community with other Christians is the essential ingredient to being able to live the christian life and not leave the faith, not fall into sin, make wise decisions and find encouragement in difficult moments.

Application

- Do you regularly attend your church's weekend meetings?
- Do you spend time in community with other Christians during the week?
- What is your next step to live in deeper community with others who are also God's children?