

grow

**Next Steps for New
Followers of Jesus Christ**

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Congratulations!

You've just started a new relationship with Jesus Christ! But what does that mean?

Whether you were in a church, watching on the internet, with a friend, or simply on your own, you trusted Jesus for forgiveness and a new life in Him. You've probably heard it called "getting saved" or being "born again."

Why did you need to be born again? The reality is no matter how good we might think we are, the Bible is clear that "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard" (Romans 3:23). In fact, you were actually dead inside. The Bible says, "Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world" (Ephesians 2:1-2a). Without God giving you a new life in Christ, your spiritual deadness becomes your condition forever. The Bible puts it this way: "The wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23) But when you trusted Jesus for forgiveness, you came to life spiritually!

Ephesians 2:4-5 says, "But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)"

When this happened, God made you a totally new person and your new life in Him started (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What does it mean that a new life started? It means that you are forgiven by Jesus, your past sins have been totally erased, and you've received a fresh start. You'll begin to feel different on the inside in a way that lets you know that God is at work in you. The Bible puts it this way: "For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children" (Romans 8:16). That doesn't mean that you'll be perfect. There is still a part of you that will be tempted to go back to your old way of living. Sometimes you'll make mistakes, but when that happens, all you have to do is tell God about it and depend on His power in you. His power will help you keep changing and become the person He designed you to be (1 John 1:9).

Completing *Next Steps for New Followers of Jesus Christ* is the first big step in moving you in the right direction in your new life in Jesus. These steps will provide simple tools to help you build a strong spiritual foundation. Each day will highlight an important spiritual practice, brief Bible passage, prayer, and additional Bible reading if you want to go further.

The practices come from the core values of Grand Rapids First. You can easily learn them by remembering the word GROW:

- **G**rowing in Christ
- **R**elating to Others
- **O**utreach to Our World
- **W**orshiping God

Each day we'll cover one letter. If you do something in each of these areas, you'll be spiritually healthy and will keep growing in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Daily Bible Reading

“One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, ‘You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy...’ Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God’s Good News. ‘The time promised by God has come at last!’ he announced. ‘The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!’” (Mark 1:9-11, 14b-15)

Prayer

Lord, thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me a brand new life! Help me to build a good foundation for this new life and to keep moving forward as a follower of Jesus.

Additional Bible Reading:

1 John 1

Growing in Christ

The “G” in the word GROW is for Growing in Christ. One of the most important ways to start doing this is to take time to pray. Jesus Himself showed us how crucial this is by regularly getting away from His followers to spend time alone praying in the wilderness (Luke 5:16). Sometimes we think of prayer as being complicated, but prayer is simply talking to God and letting Him talk to you. You don’t have to use fancy words or be a Bible expert.

Sometimes, people call their prayer time with God devotions or quiet time. Today, you’ll learn a simple pattern you can use to have a meaningful quiet time with God. This pattern can be done in as little as 10 or 15 minutes. God is not worried about how long you take; He just wants to spend time with you! You can remember this pattern by thinking of the acronym **PRAY**.

You can start your quiet time with **PRAISE**. This is as simple as taking time to praise God for who He is and thanking Him for the things He’s doing in your life. When the ancient people of God would come to His Temple for worship, as they entered the building, they would express thanks and praise (Psalm 100:4). It’s a good pattern for us as well.

After you begin with praise, you then **REPENT**. When you repent, it means that you review the condition of your heart and confess your sins to God. Repentance is feeling deep sorrow for sin, but more than that, it includes a determination to turn from sin and change your behavior. This is a very important part of keeping yourself on the right track. 1 John 1:9 tells us that “If we

confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”

Next comes the time when you **ASK**. Whether you need help with your job, have trouble with another person, or simply have a need in some area of your life, God cares about the things that concern you. Philippians 4:6a tells us “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need.”

Finally, you **YIELD** to God. This is the time when you quiet yourself to listen to God. He might speak to your heart through an impression or maybe through reading a passage of Scripture. The attitude of your heart should be like the prophet Samuel when he first began focusing his life on God: “Speak, your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10b).

In addition to praying, reading a portion of the Bible every day is vital. The Bible is the most complete way God reveals Himself to us. It’s where we see how God relates to people and what His character is like. For this week, you can do the Bible reading we’ve included for each day. After that, read through the New Testament in the Bible. Take time daily to read a small portion of the Bible to grow in your faith.

Daily Bible Reading

Then Jesus said to the disciples, “Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you’ve received it, it will be yours” (Mark 11:22-24).

Prayer

Lord, thank You that You love me so much and want to spend time with me. Thank You that You care about all the details of my life. Help me to always remember to make time for You so You can speak to me. Amen.

Additional Bible Reading:

1 John 2:1-14

Relating to Others

The “R” in GROW is for Relating to Others because friendships with other followers of Jesus are another important part of your life. When you trusted Jesus for forgiveness and a new life, you began a personal relationship with Him. But you can’t live this new life in Christ alone.

Jesus knew the importance of relationships. In fact, one of the first things He did when He began His ministry was to choose 12 men to be with Him (Mark 3:14). They helped Jesus with His ministry, and He taught them how to really live for God and represent Him. But Jesus didn’t choose them just to teach them to do ministry; they were His close circle of friends. They supported and encouraged each other. They did life together.

If these kinds of relationships were important for Jesus and His disciples, they’re important for us, too. Instead of going through this life alone, the Bible emphasizes how important healthy relationships are when it says, “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25).

The best way to connect in healthy friendships with other followers of Jesus is to join a small group. It’s important to worship together with the whole church regularly, but small groups are where the church becomes more personal. It’s the place where we connect with people who are living lives just like we are. We encourage each other, pray for each other, and focus

on growing in our relationship with Jesus. When life is great, we celebrate together. When life is tough, we lift each other up and support each other in prayer.

There are many different kinds of small groups at Grand Rapids First. If you try one that doesn't seem to work for you, simply try another. God has a circle of friends marked out for you!

An easy way to connect with a small group is to visit our small groups page at grfirst.org/smallgroups or through the Grand Rapids First app.

Another way to connect is by finding a place in the church to serve. Sign up to serve at grfirst.org/volunteer or the Grand Rapids First app. God has given all of us different gifts and skills to make a difference in the lives of people (Romans 12:4-8). When you find a place to serve, not only are you blessing other people, but you're also making friendships with others who have the same gifts and skills as you. It's nice to be ministered to by others, but in reality, we receive more blessings by giving of ourselves than by receiving (Acts 20:35).

The starting point for getting connected in the community life of Grand Rapids First is to attend the GROW Track, which meets the first four Sundays of each month. For details, go to grfirst.org/growtrack or the Grand Rapids First app. The GROW Track will help you understand what we're all about. It will also help you understand how God uniquely designed you to make a difference by using the gifts He's given you.

Daily Bible Reading

“Afterward Jesus went up on a mountain and called out the ones he wanted to go with him. And they came to him. Then he appointed twelve of them and called them his apostles. They were to accompany him...” (Mark 3:13-14a)

Prayer

Lord, thank You that You care so much about me that You put other followers of Jesus around me to encourage me as I live for You. Guide me to the right small group. Use them in my life and use me to encourage them as well. Help me use the gifts You've given me to bless others. I know that when I do, I'll really be the one receiving the blessing! Amen.

Additional Bible Reading:

1 John 2:15-29

Outreach to Our World

The “O” in GROW is for Outreach to Our World because God wants more than a relationship with you; He wants you to reach other people for Him.

Before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He gave His followers these instructions: “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you” (Matthew 28:19-20a). How do you do this?

One way is to simply be a friend. Most people who decide to follow Jesus Christ do so because of the influence of a friend or family member. You have unique influence with the people in your life. They might not come to a church service or listen to a sermon, but they can see Jesus through you!

As a friend, show genuine love and concern for the people around you. Take time to connect with them. When people know you want to be around them and are concerned about what’s important to them, their hearts become open to hear what’s important to you.

Another way to build your influence in their lives is to find a way to serve. When people face a time of need, be ready to provide help in any way you can. You can be a support when they’re sick, facing a loss, or going through a difficult time. Maybe there

is a project you can help with such as raking leaves or repairing something they can't.

Most importantly, pray for them! Ask God to work in their lives. Your willingness to be a genuine friend and to pray for them opens the door for God to use you to simply tell your story. The best way to do this is to tell people what your life was like before you were a follower of Jesus and what life is like since you've been following Jesus.

Once you've told your story, let God do the rest. You aren't responsible for making other people change. All God asks you to do is live for Him, be a genuine friend, and leave the changing of lives to Him!

Daily Bible Reading

“Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’ ‘Well,’ they replied, ‘some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets.’ Then he asked them, ‘But who do you say I am?’ Peter replied, ‘You are the Messiah’” (Mark 8:27-29).

Prayer

Lord, thank You that You want to use me to reach other people. Help me to be a genuine friend. Use my friendship to bless people so that their hearts will be open to You. I know I'm not perfect, but use my story to bring people to You. Amen.

Additional Bible Reading:

1 John 3:1-15

Worshiping God

The “W” in GROW is for Worshiping God because we were made to worship Him. To worship God means to declare or recognize His worth.

Think about when you found a great deal on something you wanted to buy. Did you keep it to yourself or did you tell someone about it? When you tell someone about the deal, you’re recognizing its worth. So, in a way you’re worshiping the great deal. It’s okay to recognize a good deal, but it’s not okay to worship other things the way we worship God because nothing compares to His greatness! We can’t let anything be as important to us as God is!

So, how do we worship? We worship with other followers of Jesus at our weekly services when we come together as a church. We’re doing the same thing we see in Psalm 35:18, which says: “Then I will thank you in front of the great assembly. I will praise you before all the people.”

We worship in the way we live our daily lives. We demonstrate how much we value God in simple things such as the way we do our jobs, how we treat other people, or even the attitude we have. Every area of life is a way we can worship God. The Bible gives us this encouragement: “And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father” (Colossians 3:17).

We also worship God by recognizing that He has given us everything we have. God is so generous with us; we should be generous toward Him. The primary way we do this is through the tithe. A tithe is 10% of your earnings. God is generous to give us everything we have and only asks us to show generosity to Him by offering 10% back to Him! When we do, He promises to give us even more! “‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!’” (Malachi 3:10).

Worship isn’t about a building or a song—it’s about living lives of gratitude and generosity because God has been great toward us!

Daily Bible Reading

“One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, ‘Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.’ Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them” (Mark 10:13-16).

Prayer

Lord, thank You for being so generous toward me. There is nothing more important to me than You! Help me to worship You at church, in the way I live my daily life, and through my tithe. Help me to live a life of thankful generosity toward You and those around me. Amen.

Additional Bible Reading:

1 John 3:16-24

Being Baptized

Now that you have some basic steps in place for building a good spiritual foundation, what else is important as you follow Jesus? One of the first things new believers are called to do is to be baptized in water. What is water baptism and why is it so important?

Water baptism is something we do in obedience to God's Word (Acts 2:38a) and to outwardly show others what has happened inside of us. Baptism symbolizes that the sinful person we used to be is dead and buried and a new person has been brought to life through Jesus Christ. Romans 6:4 says it this way: "For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives."

Jesus showed us the importance of being baptized by doing it Himself. The man whose job was to prepare people for the start of Jesus' ministry was named John. He was called John the Baptizer because he told people to turn from their sinful lives, and when they did, he baptized them in water. Amazingly, Jesus wanted to be baptized by John! Why did the perfect, sinless Son of God want to be baptized? He did it because the focus of His entire ministry was to give His life for us. By being baptized, He was foreshadowing His death and resurrection that would wash away our sins. Matthew 3:13-15 says, "Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to talk him out of it. 'I am the one who needs to be

baptized by you,' he said, 'so why are you coming to me?' But Jesus said, 'It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.' So John agreed to baptize him."

After Jesus was baptized, His early followers continued stressing the importance of baptism. In the first sermon the Apostle Peter ever preached, he said, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38a).

When we're baptized, we're making a declaration to ourselves, the people in our lives, and the powers of darkness that we are no longer the same person we once were. That person is gone and a new person has come to live a new life for God!

But what if you were baptized as a baby? Parents sometimes have their children baptized as a way of dedicating them to God, but this baptism has more meaning for the parents than for the children. After you decide to follow Jesus for yourself, it is good to be baptized even if you were baptized as a child. This baptism now has meaning for you personally!

What if you once followed Jesus and were baptized, but then fell away from walking out your faith? Is it okay to be baptized again? Yes! It is always good to declare your dedication to live for Jesus in a public way.

How can you be baptized? You can view a short orientation video and register to be baptized on the Grand Rapids First app, at [grfirst.org/baptism](https://www.grfirst.org/baptism), or by contacting the discipleship office at 616-531-2100.

Daily Bible Reading

“And then he told them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned’” (Mark 16:15-16).

Prayer

Lord, thank You for giving me new life! I want to honor You and declare to the whole world by being baptized that I've been made new. I ask for Your blessing as I follow the example of Jesus. Amen.

Additional Bible Reading:

1 John 4

The Power of the Holy Spirit

Congratulations! You've made it to day seven! Maybe you're wondering how you'll have the power to do everything you've learned and live the new life God has begun in you. The answer is through the power that comes by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has already been at work in you by giving you a new life in Jesus. The Bible sums this up best when it says, "When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

Beyond giving us a new life in Jesus, God also promised to give us power through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-8). This power enables us to live our new life in Jesus and to tell others about Him. The Bible calls this being filled with or baptized in the Holy Spirit.

This filling of the Holy Spirit happened to the earliest followers of Jesus Christ. Not only did they live powerful lives for Him, they took His message around the world (Acts 2:1-41).

How can you receive this filling of the Holy Spirit? Just ask! One of the reasons we don't receive things from God is because we don't ask. You can also ask other followers of Jesus to pray for you to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There is great power when we pray for each other (James 5:16).

What happens when you're filled with the Holy Spirit? When the first followers of Jesus Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit, it was a supernatural experience: "On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability" (Acts 2:1-4).

Don't think being filled with the Holy Spirit is a one-time experience. Just like car tires gradually lose air and need to be refilled, we need to repeatedly be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). That means we should always be asking God to fill us with His Holy Spirit and live to honor the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Daily Bible Reading

“This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. John announced: ‘Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit’” (Mark 1:4-8).

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Now that I’ve received a new life through Him, fill me with the Holy Spirit. I want everything You have for me! Fill me with the Holy Spirit’s power to live for You and share You with the people around me. Amen.

Additional Bible Reading:

1 John 5