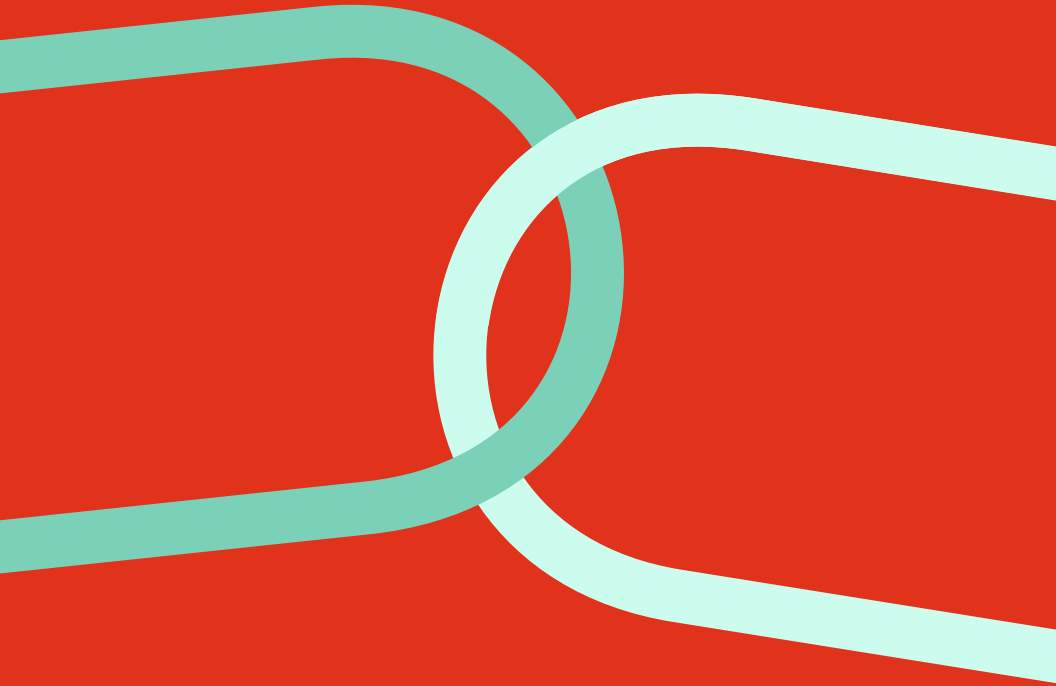


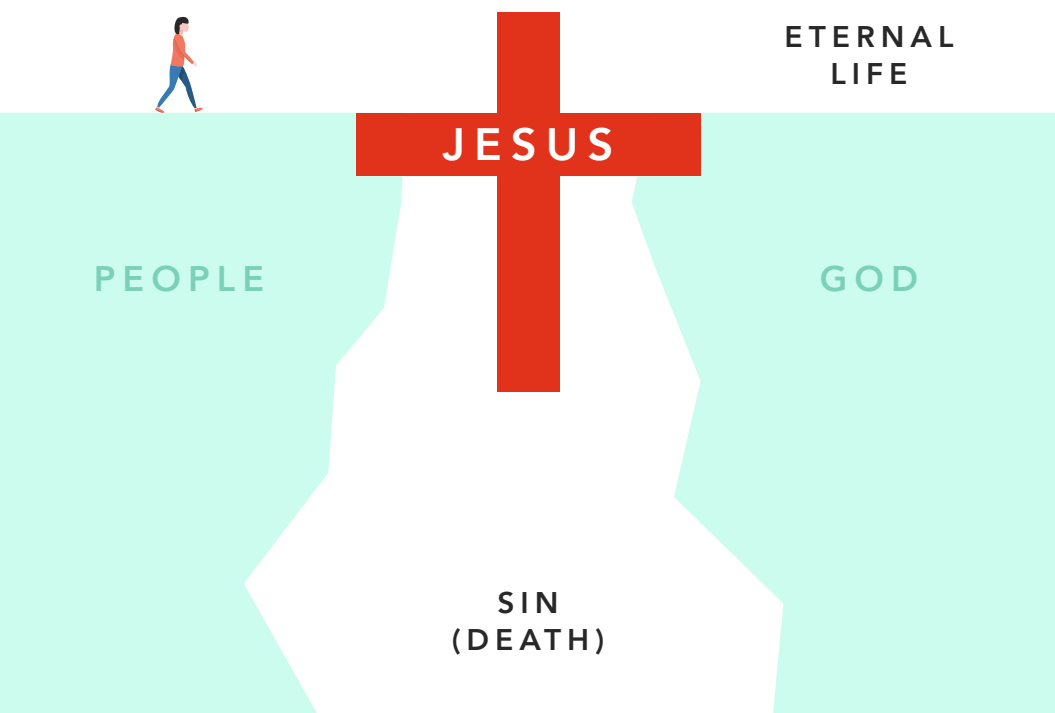
**CONNECTING
WITH GOD IN A
MEANINGFUL WAY**



Welcome!

We exist to urgently lead people to say YES to Jesus and passionately follow Him. You made a decision to follow Jesus, let's take a moment to celebrate this good news and how excited we are for you! Becoming a follower of Jesus is the most important decision you can make in your life.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
Romans 6:23 (NIV).





CONNECTING WITH GOD IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

There is certainly no one right way to connect with God. He speaks to us in a variety of ways. There are also many ways we can talk to Him (out loud, in our minds, on paper, formally, informally, etc.) At one point the disciples asked Jesus about how to pray. Undoubtedly, they saw in Jesus a vibrant and powerful way of connecting with God and wanted to learn from Him. Instead of saying to them, “You’ll need to figure this out on your own,” He was quick to give them a prayer model,

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”
Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV).

Jesus didn’t give them this prayer so they would see it as the only prayer, or to pray mindlessly over and over again. He just wanted to model some key ingredients in speaking effectively to God. For instance, we can see in this prayer intimacy with God (calling Him “Father”), reverence (acknowledging God as hallowed or holy) and boldness (asking).

There are many specific ways to connect with God in a meaningful way. These approaches are in no way meant to limit how you read the Bible or pray, but just to give you some helpful tools to move forward spiritually.

BIBLE READING

We have already seen how important it is to grow in Bible knowledge and application. Here are some steps to move forward. The first step is to get a Bible you can understand. Translations have come a long way since the King James Version written in 1611. Four hundred years later, translations are more accurate and easier to understand. The version used in this workbook is the New International Version, 2011.

A Bible with study notes is extremely helpful. They serve as a running commentary on the biblical text. Another idea is to access youversion.com on your mobile device. You can choose the translation that works best for you and it's with you all the time.

Second, you need some kind of Bible reading plan. Because the Bible isn't really one continuous book, but 66 books. You don't have to necessarily start at the beginning of Genesis and read through to Revelation. You can choose any of the books of the Bible to dive into. If you have not done much Bible reading you might want to start in the New Testament with Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

Third, don't just read. Read to understand. Have you ever been reading, and when you got to the end of the chapter you realized your mind was on cruise control and you didn't really catch any of it? One way to read more actively is with a journal or an empty notepad. Write the chapter or passage you're reading at the top of the page (i.e. John 8 or Philippians 4:1-10) and then write these three questions across the top of the page:

- **What does it say?** Paraphrase it using your own words.
- **What does it mean?** How does this impact you today?
- **What am I going to do?** What specific application will you make today?

You certainly don't have to write volumes under each question, but you might be surprised at how much you get out of your Bible reading by doing this simple exercise.

PRAYER

Again, prayer is so personal it's impossible to dictate a one-size-fits-all technique, but some guidance might be helpful. We learn from Jesus' prayer life three important things: He prayed privately, He prayed regularly, He prayed genuinely.

- 1. Pray Privately:** Jesus often was seen going out by Himself to pray, Luke 9:18 says, *"One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone."* (NLT). And again, in Mark 1:35 we read, *"Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray."* (NLT). Jesus knew that any good relationship needs times of uninterrupted one-on-one conversation. There is a depth of conversation that is not possible when you are interacting with God on the fly. Setting a certain time, a certain place, and even a certain pattern to pray (we will look at one in a moment) can be very helpful when you are having a private conversation with God.
- 2. Pray Regularly:** We see Jesus praying as a regular part of His day. It was such a normal part of His life that prayer bubbled out of Him all the time. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:18, says, *"Pray in the Spirit at all times and*

on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.” (NLT). During our day we should practice talking to God silently in our hearts about the different situations we are facing at any given time. Remember, prayer is an aspect of a vibrant loving relationship, not a ritual. No happily married person ever says, “I talked to my spouse for 10 minutes this morning so I don’t have to talk to her again until tomorrow morning.”

- 3. Pray Genuinely:** Just as we should never try to impress others with our prayers, Jesus taught we should not try to impress God either. *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”* Matthew 6:5-7 (NIV).

God wants to hear prayers that come from our hearts. He wants us to be genuine. In fact, God would much rather have you pray authentically even if you are angry with Him (and maybe don’t use courteous language) than hear flowery prayers that aren’t a true expression of how you feel.

Finally, a way to connect with God during your private sessions of prayer is journaling while praying. It might help you slow down and avoid getting off track. There are different acrostics people have used through the years to help walk through their prayers. Here is one that might be helpful: **P-R-A-Y**

Praise

God is praised over 350 times in the Bible. To praise Him is to acknowledge how great He is and to thank Him for the great things He has done. King David in the Old Testament was a master at praising God. Here is just one of his psalms that contain praise: ***“I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.”*** Psalms 9:1-2 (NIV).

Notice that he first gave thanks for all the wonderful deeds God has done. Every time we talk to God, we should easily be able to find something to thank Him for. We thank Him for His goodness, His power, His mercy, His wisdom and the many other aspects of who He is.

Repent

To repent is to confess specific sins we have committed and to turn away from doing them again (“repent” literally means to turn around). It is important to agree with God’s assessment of us that we have sinned and fallen short of His standard. If we don’t own this reality and humble ourselves, we will never fully be able to engage with Him. ***“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*** 1 John 1:8-9 (NIV). Coming clean before God is an important part of genuine prayer and reaffirms the truth that God forgives us and we don’t need to carry guilt.

Then do your best to live like Jesus did, making use of the strength and power that God has provided to you by His Holy Spirit.

Ask

God encourages us to ask for the things that are on our mind. Here's what Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount: *"Ask and it will be given to you...For everyone who asks receives...Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if He asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"* Matthew 7:7-11 (NIV). Here Jesus teaches us to ask, but also to understand that our Father in heaven reserves the right to answer according to His wisdom and love for us.

Yield

To yield means to be quiet after you have spoken to God and to listen to what He might want to say to you. If you regularly take time to listen, you will begin to hear God's voice. Use a journal to write down the thoughts and promptings that come to mind. Keeping record of what God says to you is a great way to build your faith. When you are able to look back and see what God said. How you obeyed, and how God answered, your trust & faith grew.

REFLECTION

1. What excites you and what seems daunting as you think about establishing a regular time to read the Bible and pray?
2. What book of the Bible do you want to read/study first?
3. Write out your prayer today using the P-R-A-Y method. Make sure you give enough time at the end to sit quietly and listen to God.



ECHO.CHURCH