

## Topic 2: Coming to Faith



### How to Begin a Relationship with God

"Yet to all who did receive him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

—John 1:12

In "Topic 1: A Radical Message," we saw, that to a rebellious world full of sin and suffering, brokenness and bad news, God sent his eternal son. We noted therefore that the gospel isn't just a message. It's a man—the God-man Jesus! The good news is that we can be brought into a right relationship with God—we can know God! . . . through Jesus.

Using the acrostic G-O-S-P-E-L, we began unpacking the great truths about God's epic plan to rescue the world from sin and death. Thus far in our exploration of Jesus Christ and his mission, we have seen:

The gospel is about **G**od.

The gospel is about **O**urselves.

The gospel is about a **S**avior.

The gospel is **P**owerful.

The gospel must be **E**mbraced.

The gospel is **L**ife-altering.

In short, we want to look at what it means to come to genuine faith in Christ.

When Jesus began his public ministry, he called on people to "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15).

- ▶ The Greek word translated "repent" in the New Testament comes from two Greek words that, taken together, mean literally "to change the mind."
- ▶ The Hebrew word translated "repent" in the Old Testament means "to turn back."

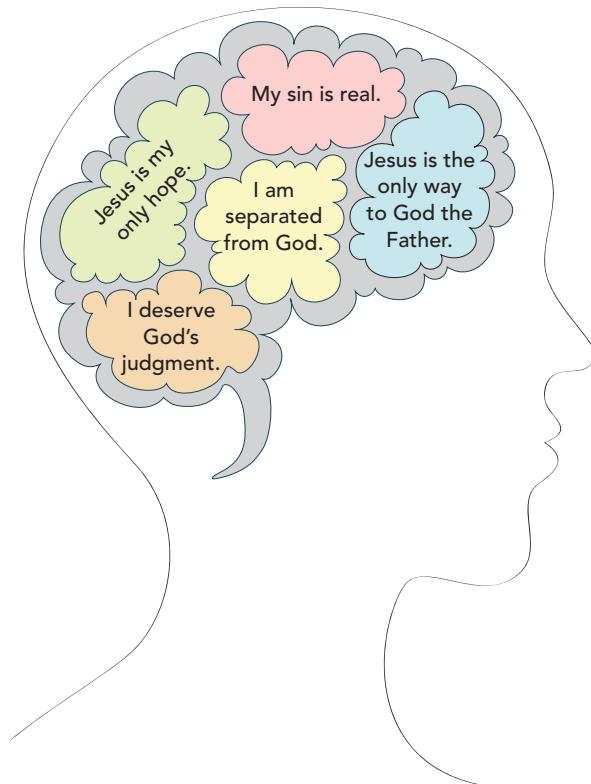
This is what repentance is: a changing of one's mind about God, about one's own condition, about what it takes to come into a relationship with God. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a life change.

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A repentant person realizes: "My sin is real. I am separated from a good and holy God. I deserve his judgment. I am in trouble. However, Jesus claims to be the way—the only way—to the Father. I can see that he is my only hope. I cannot save myself, but Jesus can save me. And he wants to."

It's been said that repentance has less to do with emotion and more to do with insight. Repentance is waking up to the truth of who God is, who we are, and what Jesus has done for us—and responding accordingly. Repentance means re-thinking our lives. God promises he will renew our minds so that we seek what is good and righteous—more and more each day.



## Bible Study

### The gospel must be Embraced.

1. Read John 1:12, our memory verse for this topic. What does it mean to receive Jesus? What does it mean to believe on his name?
2. James 2:19 challenges people who merely believe there is a God: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." Why isn't it enough to merely acknowledge that there is a God? What does it look like when someone embraces the gospel and believes as is described in John 1:12?

Some beliefs have no effect on our lives. Believing it is important to get a flu shot is not the same as actually letting a nurse jab you in the arm with a syringe full of flu vaccine. Believing in God the way he wants us to is more than nodding at a list of theological facts.

In the physical realm we exercise trust when we rest our full weight on a chair. We depend on, rely on, that chair to support us completely. In the spiritual realm, we exercise trust when we place our full confidence and hope in Christ. We rest fully on what he's done for us. We stop trusting in anyone or anything else to make us right with God. We trust in Jesus alone.



A massive wildfire, whipped along by strong winds, was consuming everything in its path. One family, seeing the impossibility of outrunning the inferno, left their home. In a nearby meadow, they lit a backfire that quickly consumed several acres of dry grass. With time running out, they then lay down in the midst of the freshly burned area and covered themselves with earth.

Almost immediately, the towering blaze reached the edge of the smoldering meadow, and swept around it, continuing its destructive path. The family was saved because they understood that the only safe place would be a place where the fire had already burned.

The gospel tells us the fire of God's wrath (because of human sin) has already touched down at one particular point in history. When it did, it completely consumed an innocent man hanging on a cross. It did not burn a large area, but it finalized God's work of judgment.

The good news is that we can be forgiven when we trust in the one who bore God's judgment for sin on the cross. Jesus is our "burned-out area." He is the one and only safe hiding place for sinners.

One word for this kind of trust-filled belief is "faith." Read the story in the sidebar for an example of what this kind of faith is like.

The most obvious way to express faith in God is through prayer, through simply talking to God. That can be done silently or out loud. You can do it privately or with a more mature Christian. If you sense God drawing your heart to Jesus, respond! Tell God what is taking place in your soul.

Understand there is no magical "salvation prayer." The words you speak to God aren't nearly as important as the heart behind them. Admit to God your sin and need for forgiveness. Tell God that you are placing your faith in Jesus, that you are trusting in all that he has done for you. Then thank God for the great promise of the gospel. Thank him for giving you new life through Christ.

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3. If you have put your trust in Christ, what were the circumstances? If you haven't, what holds you back?

## For those who do believe in Christ . . .

### The gospel is Life-altering.

4. Read 1 Peter 2:9–12 and 3:15. According to these passages, how should a follower of Jesus live in a world full of bad news?

5. How has your faith in Christ altered your life?

6. This topic is titled "Coming to Faith." Consider the following verses that speak of faith:

- ▶ "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!'" (Luke 17:5).
- ▶ "Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness (Colossians 2:7, NLT).
- ▶ "We hope that your faith will grow so that the boundaries of our work among you will be extended (2 Corinthians 10:15, NLT).

From what you've read about faith in these verses, what can you say about how faith works in a believer's life?

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Faith in Christ isn't the finish line of the spiritual life; it's only the beginning. We "repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). Then as disciples, we heed Jesus' call to "Follow me"



(Mark 1:17). This requires ongoing trust. In a sense we keep coming to faith, or at least coming back to faith, every day, for the rest of our lives.

The gospel is glorious and beautiful and mind-boggling. It is mysterious and miraculous. How difficult it is to wrap our hearts and minds around God's grace. But we can experience it by faith.

## The Difference Genuine Faith Makes

When we trust in Jesus we go . . .	
<b>From being lost</b> Isaiah 53:6; Mark 6:34	<b>To being found</b> Matthew 18:12; Luke 15
<b>From being spiritually blind</b> John 9:39–41; 2 Corinthians 4:4	<b>To having spiritual vision</b> Luke 4:18–19; 24:31; John 9:39
<b>From being dirty or impure</b> Romans 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:7	<b>To being clean and pure</b> Hebrews 9:14; 1 John 1:9
<b>From being foolish and ignorant of God</b> Acts 3:17; 17:23; Ephesians 4:18; 1 Timothy 1:13	<b>To knowing God in wisdom</b> Luke 1:77; 1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 1:8, 17; James 1:5
<b>From being at war with God (his enemy)</b> Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21	<b>To being at peace with God (his friend)</b> John 15:14–15; Romans 5:1
<b>From being children of wrath</b> Ephesians 2:3	<b>To being beloved children of God</b> John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 3:2
<b>From being under God's condemnation and wrath</b> Romans 1:18; 2:5; 5:18	<b>To being justified and pardoned by God</b> Romans 5:18
<b>From being spiritually dead</b> Romans 5:12; Ephesians 2:1, 5	<b>To being spiritually reborn and made alive</b> John 3; 5:24–26; Ephesians 2:5
<b>From being in darkness</b> Matthew 4:16 John 3:19; Acts 26:18; Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:8	<b>To being in light</b> John 8:12; Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:13
<b>From owing God a debt</b> Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 1:19	<b>To being ransomed and redeemed</b> Matthew 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; Hebrews 9:15
<b>From being enslaved to sin/in bondage</b> John 8:34; Romans 6:6, 16–18, 20, 22	<b>To being free</b> John 8:36; Romans 6:18, 22; Galatians 5:1, 13
<b>From being an alien to God's kingdom</b> 1 Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:13	<b>To being a citizen of heaven</b> Philippians 3:20



## Take-Home Reflections

We all sin. I have sinned. I'm not perfect and I'm not proud of everything I've done. The Bible says we deserve death for our sins (Romans 3:23). But the good news is that God sent Jesus, not ultimately to teach or preach or heal (though he did all those things). God sent his son to die. At the cross, God was both righteous Judge and loving Father. The very payment he required for sin, he supplied. The crucified Jesus took our terrible punishment. The resurrected Jesus offers a full pardon and new life to all who will trust in him.

Despite our sin, God loves us just as we are and promises to forgive us our sins and make us clean. All we have to do is accept this amazing gift of grace.

Have you trusted Jesus for salvation? Is he *your way, your truth, your life?*

## Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse:

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

2. Read John 3 and 4. Notice how Jesus interacted, first with a respected Jewish religious leader, then with a Samaritan woman with a history of failed relationships.

3. Wrestle with one or two of these questions:

- ▶ What would you say to a child who asked you to explain faith?
- ▶ Based on John 1:12, is every person on earth a child of God? Why or why not?
- ▶ How can a person tell if his or her faith is growing?
- ▶ Do you think that there is a difference between believing things *about* Jesus and believing *in* Jesus? How might these two be related?