

NIV

SELECTIONS FROM THE  
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

# BELIEVE

LIVING THE STORY OF THE BIBLE  
TO BECOME LIKE JESUS



GENERAL EDITOR

RANDY FRAZEE

*~Second Edition~*

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TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

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RANDY FRAZEE

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# Preface

A distinguished sociologist embarked on a quest to answer this question, “How did the marginal Jesus movement become the dominant religious force in the Western world within just a few centuries?” By his estimates the number of Christians grew to 33,882,008 believers by AD 350.<sup>1</sup> A movement that started with Jesus and a handful of his followers grew at an amazing rate! This professor was not a personal follower of Jesus but was mesmerized by the influence of Jesus’ life on the entire world.

What he discovered in his adventures through history was a group of very common, ordinary folks who ended up doing uncommon, extraordinary things. These people valued others who were looked down upon. When two devastating epidemics of measles and smallpox wiped out one-fourth to one-third of the population of the Roman Empire, these Christ-followers not only nursed their own but also took in those whose families cast them out into the streets to die. People flocked to this new community — a community founded on a rare expression of love. Anyone who said “yes” to Jesus’ invitation to life was welcomed.

At the end of the unbelieving social scientist’s extensive search, he wrote these words: “Therefore, as I conclude this study, I find it necessary to confront what appears to me to be *the ultimate factor* in the rise of Christianity ... I believe that it was the religion’s particular doctrines that permitted Christianity to be among the most sweeping and successful revitalization movements in history. And it was the way these doctrines took on actual flesh, the way they directed organizational actions and individual behavior that led to the rise of Christianity.”<sup>2</sup>

In a nutshell, the early Christians BELIEVED. They simply, by faith, believed with their whole hearts the powerful truths taught in the Scriptures. It changed them from the inside out. Their loving and courageous actions toward their family, neighbors and

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1. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10.

2. *Ibid.*, 211.

even strangers were merely outpourings of the love that was flowing from inside them. What are the core truths these followers believed that so radically changed their lives for the good? These truths make up the content of the book you now hold in your hands — *Believe*.

As you read the first core belief about God, remember *Believe* is an action word. God is personally watching over you as you embark on this journey. He doesn't want you to just believe in your head these truths; he wants you to believe with your whole heart his Word as the operating system for your life. He wants to transform your life and family for good and forever. He wants you to join the movement. He wants to put the "extra" in your "ordinary" so you can live an "extraordinary" life in Christ. What he did so radically in the beginning, he is doing again today, if you will only BELIEVE.

Here is my prayer for you:

*"Father, you fully know the reader who holds this book in their hands. You know them by name. You love them deeply—always have, always will. As they embark on this amazing journey, give them the faith to believe your truths with their whole heart. Work within them. Let that good work push out to their mouth, ears, hands and feet to positively affect the people you have placed around them. As they finish reading the last page, may they whisper to you and then shout to the world—I BELIEVE!"*

— Randy Frazee  
General Editor

# THINK



## What Do I Believe?

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up  
in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out  
of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth  
speaks what the heart is full of.

*Luke 6:45*

**W**hat we believe in our hearts will define who we become. God wants you to become like Jesus. This is who God created you to be. It is the most truthful and powerful way to live. The journey to *becoming* like Jesus begins by *thinking* like Jesus.

The following ten chapters will introduce and expose you to the key beliefs of the Christian life. These beliefs were not only taught by Jesus but also modeled by Jesus when he walked this earth. Because we live from the heart, embracing these core truths in both our minds and our hearts is the first step to truly becoming like Jesus.

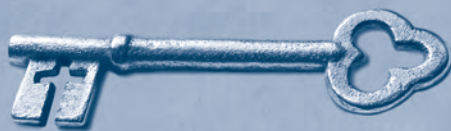
Each of the following chapters contains Scripture passages from Genesis to Revelation focused on a particular belief. You are about to discover what God wants you to know and believe about these important topics. Embark on each page with a passion to learn and understand. Then prayerfully ask, “What do *I* believe?”

Fully adopting these fantastic truths in your heart may not come at the end of reading the chapter. If you are honest, it may take a while, and that is okay. The Christian life is a journey. There are no shortcuts. As each of the key concepts takes up residence in your heart they, with the amazing help of God’s presence in your life, will change your life for the good.

When you start *thinking* like Jesus, you are well on your way to *becoming* like Jesus.



# THINK



## CHAPTER

### 1

## God

### KEY QUESTION

Who is God?

### KEY IDEA

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God —  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### KEY VERSE

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God, and the fellowship  
of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

*2 Corinthians 13:14*

*Belief in God is the very foundation of the Christian faith. Christianity is the only spiritual belief system that emanates from a Creator-God who had no beginning, who interacts with his creation as a plural entity and who exhibits preeminence over all other gods and beings.*

*We will be reading Scripture passages in this chapter that describe how we know about God, all aspects of his essence and what they mean to us:*

- *God Reveals Himself*
- *The One True God*
- *God in Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit*
- *The Trinity in Our Lives*

## GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

*Everything begins with God. The Bible never seeks to defend the existence of God. It is assumed. God has revealed himself so powerfully through his creation—both at the macro and micro level—that at the end of the day, no one will have an excuse for not putting their trust in him.*

 **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**

GENESIS 1:1 

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
 the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
 Day after day they pour forth speech;  
 night after night they reveal knowledge.  
 They have no speech, they use no words;  
 no sound is heard from them.  
 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
 their words to the ends of the world.  
 In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

PSALM 19:1–4

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

ROMANS 1:20

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In what ways do you see the invisible qualities  
of God revealed in nature?

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## THE ONE TRUE GOD

*From beginning to end, the Bible reveals that there is only one true God. But who is he? The book of Deuteronomy looks back at how Moses had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. During that time God, through the ten plagues, had revealed himself as the one true, all-powerful God over Pharaoh. Now a new generation had grown up in the wilderness and was poised to inherit the land God had promised Abraham. Moses offered the second generation a series of farewell speeches to remind them to choose, worship and follow the one true God—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If they did, all would go well for them.*

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.** Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. DEUTERONOMY 6:1–9

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What are some of the main points  
of God's requirements for his people? Why do you  
think he emphasized these things?

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*After Moses died, Joshua became the next great leader of the Israelites. He was charged with leading the people into the promised land. God was with them and fought for them as they began conquering the land. Under Joshua's leadership the Israelites remained steady in their devotion to God. Before Joshua died, he gathered the people together and issued them a stiff challenge to choose to serve the Lord, the one true God.*

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt.

"Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time.

"I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

"Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove

them out before you — also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’

**“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”**

Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.”

Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the LORD.”

Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

“Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”

On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

“See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”

Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel.

JOSHUA 24:1–31

*Unfortunately the Israelites failed to keep their promise to follow only God. Through the people's repeated disobedience, God weakened Israel's influence—445 years after Joshua died—by dividing them into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Israel did not have one good king during its more than 200 years of existence. King Ahab was particularly wicked, as he introduced the worship of the pagan god Baal to Israel. But God demonstrated through the prophet Elijah that he, the Lord, not Baal or any other “god,” is the one true God.*

Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”

“I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the LORD’s commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. **Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”**

But the people said nothing.

Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the LORD’s

prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire — he is God."

Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." So they took the bull given them and prepared it.

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."

"Do it again," he said, and they did it again.

"Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

**At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it**

be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

**When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD — he is God! The LORD — he is God!”**

Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

1 KINGS 18:16–40

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Why did God have to prove over and over that he is the one true God?

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## **GOD IN THREE PERSONS: FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT**

*Throughout the Old Testament, people were invited to worship the one true God, but what do we know about this God of miracles and creative wonder? Christians believe God is actually three persons, a “Trinity.” Though the word “Trinity” isn’t found in the Bible, in the very beginning of God’s story, the creation story, we see hints that God is plural. Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, ‘Let **us** make mankind in **our** image, in **our** likeness.’” God is himself a mini-community.*

*The creation story tells us we were created in God’s image. When he made the first human (Adam), God wanted him to experience the community and relationship that has eternally existed within the Trinity. That’s why he made Eve. Notice that Adam and Eve were not two separate beings. Eve came out of Adam, and they became two distinct persons who shared one being, like God. God is three distinct persons who share a single being.*

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.



Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. **Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.**

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. GENESIS 2:4–9

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

**The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”**

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. **Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.**

The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called ‘woman,’  
for she was taken out of man.”

**That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.**


*Recalling Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness,’” God as a plural being is clearly evident from the very beginning of the Bible. But what are the identities of the individual persons of God, and how are they just one being? How do they interact? The opening words of John’s Gospel makes the answer more clear.*

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

JOHN 1:1–5

*The “Word” here refers to Jesus. John refers to him as “God,” as divine. John also says Jesus was there in the beginning. Jesus, the divine Word, partnered with God to create all that we see and all that we have yet to see.*

*So who were the other members of the Trinity? The second sentence of the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit was also present at creation: “The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Jesus and the Spirit were at the creation of the world; these two persons are God. Is that it? Who else makes up the person of God? Fast-forward to the baptism of Jesus at the age of 30 to discover the answer. As you read this account, look for the appearance of all three persons of the Trinity.*

 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar — when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene — during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.  
 Every valley shall be filled in,  
 every mountain and hill made low.  
 The crooked roads shall become straight,  
 the rough ways smooth.  
 And all people will see God's salvation.'"


LUKE 3:1–6

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

LUKE 3:15–18

**When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph.

LUKE 3:21–23 

*Three distinct persons are fully revealed in Scripture to make up the identity of the one true God: the Father, the Son Jesus and the Spirit. And all three were involved at the baptism of Jesus—the Father spoke, the Son was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended on the Son. Throughout the centuries, followers of Jesus have come to call the one true God the Trinity, three persons who share one being. As difficult as this concept is to understand, it is important to our lives.*

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In what ways have you experienced God as Father?  
 As Jesus the Son? As the Holy Spirit?

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## THE TRINITY IN OUR LIVES

*In the spirit of Joshua of the Old Testament, in the early church Paul called people to declare the identity of the one true God. During his travels Paul went to the great Areopagus in Athens, Greece. The intellectual people who lived there created an altar to many gods. Notice how they even created an altar dedicated “to an unknown God” in case they missed one and therefore offended them. Paul declares the identity of this God as the one who created everything in the beginning (see Genesis 1–2) and is now revealed in the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. His words to the people of Athens are applicable to all those who believe—God is everywhere and there is nothing in this world that his hand has not touched. The Trinity is woven into every aspect of our lives.*

While Paul was waiting for [Silas and Timothy] in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbling trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship — and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

**“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by**

**human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.** From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

**“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”**

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

ACTS 17:16–34

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What is meant by the phrase Paul quoted: “For in him we live and move and have our being?” Why do you think this needed to be said to this group of Athenians?

---

*The power and identity of the one true God is highlighted throughout Paul’s writing, including the last words of 2 Corinthians, which he penned with the benediction below.*

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

*Notice how all three members of the Trinity are involved in our lives. God, the Father, loves us and sought a way for us to come*

*back into a relationship with him. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, provided the way back to God by offering himself as a sacrifice in our place. Now that we believe, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, fellowships with us as we journey through life, guiding and comforting us every step of the way.*

## WHAT WE BELIEVE

*The Bible never tries to prove the existence of God—his existence is simply an assumed fact. God has clearly revealed himself through creation, in events such as Jesus' baptism and in our own consciences, leaving everyone without excuse in the end. The key question we asked at the beginning of this chapter comes down to the declaration of who the one true God is. The God who protected Israel and demonstrated power over false gods declares, "I AM!"*

*The journey of faith begins with our belief in God. Like the Israelites of the Old Testament and the early Christians of the New Testament, we too are called to make a personal declaration. Do we believe in the one true God? Do we accept the Bible's revelation that God exists in three persons?*

# ACT



## What Should I Do?

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

*1 Corinthians 9:24 – 27*

**W**hen you study the life of Jesus you will notice a distinct pattern. Jesus faithfully lived in a purposeful way. Once again, Jesus was modeling for us the Christian life. We would do well to simply follow his pattern — to *act* like Jesus.

The following ten chapters are going to introduce you to the key spiritual practices of Christian life. You will encounter axioms to guide you and real-life stories to inspire you.

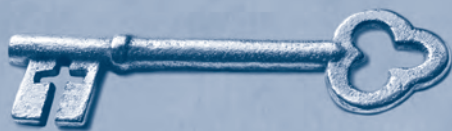
As you read each chapter and come to understand what God wants you to do, prayerfully ask yourself, “Will I do what God is inviting me to do?” In the passage above, the apostle Paul invites us to think of the Christian life like an athlete. If an Olympic runner wants to cross the finish line first, they must commit to a life of strict training. Essentially, Paul is saying that if we want to win at life, we too need to be disciplined in the way we approach each day.

If you resolve to practice what you are about to learn, remember you will not be alone. God’s Spirit can give you the internal strength, silence the voices of dissenters and blow wind at your back.

These practices will not only aid you in understanding the key beliefs, they will also catalyze you in fulfilling your mission to love God and to let his love flow through you to your neighbors, so all people will know God and know you are his disciple.

On your mark ... get set ... GO!

# ACT



## CHAPTER

### 11

## Worship

#### KEY QUESTION

How do I honor God in the way he deserves?

#### KEY IDEA

I worship God for who he is  
and what he has done for me.

#### KEY VERSE

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.

*Psalm 95:1–2*



As we read in Chapter 1, the first key belief in the Christian life begins with God. It is only logical that the first key practice in the Christian life is worshiping God. When we worship we are taking the revelation about the one true God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and reaffirming our belief that he is involved in our lives and wants to be in a relationship with us. As we do this, the amazing truths about God move from concepts in our heads to cries of our hearts. When we worship God for who he is and what he has done for us, it not only cements our confidence in God as we approach each day and each situation, but it also enables us to receive his love. When we receive God's love in our hearts, we begin to see the world differently—as people made in God's image.

So we can read this chapter with great anticipation as we explore the different aspects of worship, including:

- The Heart's Intent
- Unashamed Worshipers
- Worshiping Together

## THE HEART'S INTENT

Worshiping God for who he is and what he has done for us can be expressed in many different forms and diverse environments, but it's what we believe in our hearts that matters to God. Throughout Scripture we see how God's people worshiped him on towering mountaintops, inside homes with dirt floors, at a lavishly adorned temple and in dark prisons. They demonstrated their devotion to God with singing, dancing, sacrifices and public and private prayer. What's most important to God is not the way that we choose to worship him, but the motivation that directs our actions.

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What does the following passage from Psalm 95 tell us about how and why we should worship God?

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Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.

For the LORD is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.  
In his hand are the depths of the earth,  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.  
The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.

**Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;  
for he is our God  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care.**

PSALM 95:1–7

*During Old Testament times, worship involved animal sacrifices. Instead of leaving his people with no recourse except to face their punishment for sin, God, in his mercy, allowed his people to sacrifice the best animals from their herd as a payment for their disobedience. The animal had to be without defect, since a defective sacrifice could not be a substitute for a defective people. This practice was intended to be accompanied by repentance. The worshiper confessed their sin and laid hands on the animal; then the sin was symbolically transferred away from the sinner to the sacrifice.*

*Unfortunately, over time the Israelites' sacrifices became meaningless rituals. God was angry and heartbroken. The people brought him an abundance of sacrifices, yet their character and conduct were anything but pleasing to him. God doesn't want us to simply go through the motions; he wants us to change in our hearts.*

“The multitude of your sacrifices —  
what are they to me?” says the LORD.  
“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,  
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;  
I have no pleasure  
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.  
When you come to appear before me,  
who has asked this of you,

this trampling of my courts?  
 Stop bringing meaningless offerings!  
 Your incense is detestable to me.  
 New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations —  
 I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.  
 Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals  
 I hate with all my being.  
 They have become a burden to me;  
 I am weary of bearing them.  
 When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
 I hide my eyes from you;  
 even when you offer many prayers,  
 I am not listening.

Your hands are full of blood!

Wash and make yourselves clean.  
 Take your evil deeds out of my sight;  
 stop doing wrong.  
 Learn to do right; seek justice.  
 Defend the oppressed.  
 Take up the cause of the fatherless;  
 plead the case of the widow.

**“Come now, let us settle the matter,”  
says the LORD.**

**“Though your sins are like scarlet,  
 they shall be as white as snow;  
 though they are red as crimson,  
 they shall be like wool.**

If you are willing and obedient,  
 you will eat the good things of the land;  
 but if you resist and rebel,  
 you will be devoured by the sword.”

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

ISAIAH 1:11–20

*Despite knowing better, God’s people throughout history failed him in their worship practices. In the New Testament, those who*

*neglected to worship and honor God properly received some harsh words from Jesus. This was especially true for the religious leaders whose layers of religious exercises and rituals hid a weak and shallow faith. As a crowd gathered to listen to Jesus as he taught, he warned them about the influence of these hollow religious leaders.*

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As you read the passage below from Matthew 23, ponder this question: With what behaviors and attitudes of the Pharisees did Jesus take issue? (Hint: Jesus introduced each one with “woe to you.”)

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Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

**“Woe to you,** teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

**“Woe to you,** teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

**“Woe to you,** blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

**“Woe to you,** teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

**“Woe to you,** teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

**“Woe to you,** teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

MATTHEW 23:1–28

## UNASHAMED WORSHIPERS

*When God calls us to love him with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength, he is demanding that we hold nothing back from him. A commitment to worship God is a vow to be bold and unashamed of our love and devotion to him. With great power, God rescued the Israelites when the army of Egypt had them backed against the Red Sea. After their escape, Moses and his sister, Miriam, led the Israelites in an unapologetic song of celebration and blessing, praising God for who he is and what he had done for them.*

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

“I will sing to the LORD,  
for he is highly exalted.  
Both horse and driver  
he has hurled into the sea.

**“The LORD is my strength and my defense;  
he has become my salvation.**

**He is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.**

The LORD is a warrior;  
the LORD is his name.

Pharaoh’s chariots and his army  
he has hurled into the sea.

The best of Pharaoh’s officers  
are drowned in the Red Sea.

The deep waters have covered them;  
they sank to the depths like a stone.

Your right hand, LORD,  
was majestic in power.

Your right hand, LORD,  
shattered the enemy.

“In the greatness of your majesty  
you threw down those who opposed you.

You unleashed your burning anger;  
it consumed them like stubble.

By the blast of your nostrils  
the waters piled up.

The surging waters stood up like a wall;  
the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.

The enemy boasted,  
‘I will pursue, I will overtake them.

I will divide the spoils;  
I will gorge myself on them.

I will draw my sword  
and my hand will destroy them.’

But you blew with your breath,  
and the sea covered them.

They sank like lead  
in the mighty waters.

Who among the gods  
is like you, LORD?

Who is like you —  
majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glory,  
working wonders?

“You stretch out your right hand,  
and the earth swallows your enemies.

In your unfailing love you will lead  
the people you have redeemed.

In your strength you will guide them  
to your holy dwelling.

The nations will hear and tremble;  
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.

The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,  
the leaders of Moab will be seized with  
trembling,

the people of Canaan will melt away;  
terror and dread will fall on them.

By the power of your arm  
they will be as still as a stone —  
until your people pass by, LORD,  
until the people you bought pass by.

You will bring them in and plant them  
on the mountain of your inheritance —  
the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling,  
the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established.

“The LORD reigns  
for ever and ever.”

When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all

the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the LORD,  
for he is highly exalted.  
Both horse and driver  
he has hurled into the sea.”

EXODUS 15:1–21

*While Moses and Miriam expressed their praise vocally, bold worship can also be displayed with very few words. Take Daniel, for example. His quiet refusal to worship anyone or anything but the one true God was risky because King Darius dealt harshly with disobedience in his kingdom. Unlike the songs of Moses and Miriam, it was Daniel's actions that did all the talking.*

🔑 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered — in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” So King Darius put the decree in writing.

**Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows**



**opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.** Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands — in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”

So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”

A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”

The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of

the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.


At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:

"May you prosper greatly!

"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

"For he is the living God  
and he endures forever;  
his kingdom will not be destroyed,  
his dominion will never end.  
He rescues and he saves;  
he performs signs and wonders  
in the heavens and on the earth.  
He has rescued Daniel  
from the power of the lions."

DANIEL 6:1–27 


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What effect did Daniel's bold worship have on the unbelieving King Darius? In what ways do you think our modern-day worship could have that same effect?

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*God's rescue of Daniel from the lions is just one example of his power and greatness.*

*God's signs and wonders are undeniably awe-inspiring. In the book of Acts, Paul's and Silas's boldness got them thrown into jail; then as they prayed and sang hymns of worship during the night, a sudden earthquake resulted in their release.*

 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-

telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”


The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

**About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose.** The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole household.

When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.”

ACTS 16:16–35 

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Why do you think God desires that we worship him when we are in a difficult situation? When was the last time you worshiped God when it might not have immediately made sense to do so?

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## WORSHIPING TOGETHER

*A relationship with God can be a private and personal experience, but much of worship is meant to be practiced in community. God is a community within himself (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and his Word encourages us to gather with other believers to encourage one another, pray together and remember God’s love for us. Since the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus, the dynamics of communal worship have changed drastically. Animal sacrifices are no longer required to restore a relationship with God. Instead, through Jesus’ blood, shed as a voluntary sacrifice, those who repent and accept Jesus as their Savior will have their sins forgiven.*

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
but a body you prepared for me;  
with burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you were not pleased.

Then I said, ‘Here I am — it is written about me  
in the scroll —

I have come to do your will, my God.’”

First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” — though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

“This is the covenant I will make with them  
after that time, says the Lord.  
I will put my laws in their hearts,  
and I will write them on their minds.”

Then he adds:

“Their sins and lawless acts  
I will remember no more.”

And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

**Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest [Jesus] over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.** Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

*The Lord's Supper essentially replaced the practice of animal sacrifice for sin in the New Testament church. When believers gather to pray, sing and learn, they break bread and share a cup of wine as a way of remembering Christ's love for them. Jesus introduced this new practice to his disciples the night before his crucifixion.*

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

"Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."

They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

**And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."**

**In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.** But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that.

Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

LUKE 22:7–30

*Of course, believers can also honor Jesus' sacrifice every day in the way that they choose to live. No one emphasized this more consistently than the apostle Paul. While under house arrest in Rome, Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Colossae. He encouraged them to throw off their old, self-centered way of living and commit to live solely for the purpose of worshiping and serving God. Paul's instructions were not addressed to individual worshipers, but to the worship community as a whole.*

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord for-

gave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

COLOSSIANS 3:1–17

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According to the apostle Paul, what was the centerpiece of New Testament worship? What attitudes and actions constituted proper worship?

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## WHAT WE BELIEVE

*Throughout Scripture, believers in God are instructed to worship him. We are not called to merely go through the motions but instead we are encouraged to authentically worship God from our very hearts—as broken as they may be. While worshipping God for who he is and what he has done for us can be a private and personal practice, we can also feel free to share our worship of the one true God with the world. Finally, the practice of worship should also be expressed in community with others. This pleases God and encourages us. We can worship God from our hearts through every single breath, expression, thought and activity of our lives. Doing this habitually will surely lead us closer to the great and gracious God of the universe. So, “Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song” (Psalm 95:1–2).*





## Who Am I Becoming?

I am the vine; you are the branches.  
If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear  
much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

*John 15:5*

In the passage above Jesus compares the Christian life to a vine. He is the vine; we are the branches. If we remain in the vine of Christ, over time we will produce amazing and scrumptious fruit at the end of our branches for all to see and taste.

People love ripe, delicious-tasting fruit but grimace at green, rotten or artificial fruit. Jesus wants to produce in us fruit that brings great joy to us and to others. For this to happen, we must remain in Christ. To remain simply means to “stay put.” Becoming like Jesus is a journey. Spiritual growth is compounding. The longer we remain consistent with Christ, the better it gets.

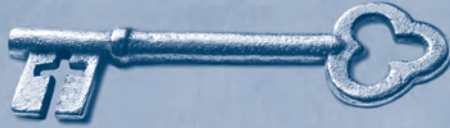
Nurturing the passion and discipline to *think* and *act* like Jesus is our proactive part in remaining in the vine of Christ, but we are not alone. The Father is the gardener. He waters, tills the soil, makes sure we have the proper exposure to the sun and prunes us.

As we remain in Christ and the Gardener does his work, eventually the bud of fruit appears on the end of our branches. With more time the fruit grows and ripens. Mature fruit on the outside gives evidence to the health of the branch on the inside. Mature fruit on the outside ministers to the people God has put in our life. It draws them to us; it nurtures them and gives them refreshment. This pleases God when we “pay forward” the love he first deposited in us.

The final ten chapters lay out the ten key virtues God desires to see developed in your life. As you read, pray, “This is who I want to become!” And with God’s help, you will.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

*Philippians 4:13*



## CHAPTER

# 21

## Love

### KEY QUESTION

What does it mean to sacrificially,  
and unconditionally love others?

### KEY IDEA

I am committed to loving God and loving others.

### KEY VERSE

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

*1 John 4:10–12*

We believe to become. The ten key beliefs of the Christian life are not an end in themselves. They are to be understood in our minds (a renewal from the fall) and then accepted in our hearts by engaging in the ten spiritual practices. We are now moving to the ten key virtues of the Christian life. As the beliefs are embraced and owned in our hearts, “buds” of the virtues, or the fruit of the Spirit, appear on the external branches of our lives for others to see and taste. The ultimate fruit, the essential virtue, the most important expression of being like Jesus, is LOVE. What does it mean to sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others?

The Scripture passages included in this chapter will provide the answer under the following topics:

- Love Defined
- The Greatest Commandment
- A New Command
- Loving Examples

## LOVE DEFINED

*The Bible is a complex narrative. But what is the big—yet simple—idea behind all the stories and teachings contained in this ancient book? Love. Love dominates God’s story. First Corinthians 13 provides us with an earnest description of love that resonates throughout Scripture.*

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As you read 1 Corinthians 13 below, make two lists. What are the characteristics of love in the positive sense (all that love is). What characteristics does love not have?

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If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

**And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.**

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1–13

## THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

*Love as the greatest commandment can be found early in God's story with his people. For example, near the end of his life, Moses gathered the Israelites together to remind them of what truly mattered as they readied themselves to enter the promised land. His words, recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, include a passage known as the Shema (Hebrew for "hear"), which later became the Jewish confession of faith, recited twice daily at the morning and evening prayer services. As the Shema beautifully articulates, the love between God and his people has always been the driver behind a life of faith.*

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. **Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.** These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4–9

*Flowing from the priority to love God with our whole hearts, souls and strength is the command to love our neighbor as ourselves.*

“Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

**“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”**

LEVITICUS 19:17–18

*Jesus confirmed these two commands from the Old Testament—love God and love others—as the greatest of all the commandments during an encounter recorded in the New Testament between Jesus and the religious leaders.*

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

**“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”**

“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

MARK 12:28–34

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Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? How would you describe the amount of love you show for others? Are you satisfied with your answers?

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## A NEW COMMAND

*Every moral law of the Old Testament fits under one of these two greater commands—love God and love others. The Law was given to express God’s high standards for community in his kingdom and to demonstrate legally that people were incapable of keeping God’s perfect commands and requirements and needed a savior. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and offered us a new commandment. Interestingly, it was after Judas left the gathering with the disciples at the Last Supper to betray Jesus that Jesus changed the formula for love and issued a new command.*

Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

JOHN 13:31–35

*From this point on the commandment to love is never referred to again in the same way. Instead of us trying hard to love God and others, we receive Christ’s love for us and then pass it on to others. This is what Jesus did as our example. He received the love of the Father and passed it on to us. It is God’s love in us that gives us the capacity to love others.*

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Put into your own words what happened in the shift from the Great Commandment of the Old Testament to the new command of Jesus.

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*Left to our own sinful nature, or flesh, we move away from unconditional and sacrificial love and instead crave to satisfy our own wants over the needs and interests of others. Living a life of love requires the presence of God’s love and power within us. When we yield to this presence in our lives, it produces within us love for*

*others. The Law provides some instruction regarding how to live a life of love; the Spirit empowers us to actually do it.*

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

GALATIANS 5:13–25

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After Paul lists all the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit, why did he then write, “Against such things there is no law”?

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*Our capacity to love begins with receiving God’s love for us. From this reservoir we pour out love toward one another. The presence of God’s Spirit in us, working through us to overcome our passion for self in favor of loving others, is confirmation that we are, in fact, children of God.*

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Who-

ever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

**We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.**

1 JOHN 4:7–21

*With this increased capacity for God's love to flow in and through us comes increased expectation. The bar that Jesus and Paul set is higher than we can achieve on our own. But with God's love in us, it becomes quite possible.*

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people,



what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

MATTHEW 5:43–48

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

ROMANS 13:8–10

*Although we may love our brother or sister, all relationships have their issues. Unfortunately, dissonance can replace the love when we leave hurts and offenses unresolved. When Peter approached Jesus with a question about forgiveness, Jesus answered the question and followed it up with a poignant parable to illustrate his point. It is forgiveness that keeps relationships connected and prevents bitterness from dividing people.*

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” MATTHEW 18:21–35

## LOVING EXAMPLES

*Now that we have a clear understanding of love as God intended it to be, it’s powerful to look at how that love has been exemplified by God’s people in the Bible. One of the most beautiful and inspiring stories of someone loving another as they would themselves is Jonathan and David. Jonathan, the son of King Saul, the first monarch of Israel, was next in line to reign. But when young David emerged into the limelight after killing the Philistine giant Goliath with only a slingshot, it was clear that God had other plans. Jonathan recognized God’s hand on David and graciously stepped aside and even protected David. King Saul saw the same thing, but instead became driven by jealousy and insecurity.*

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As you read the story below from 1 Samuel 18 and 19, write down the ways that Jonathan offered David unconditional and sacrificial love.

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🔑 Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. **And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.**

1 SAMUEL 18:1–4

Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David and warned him, “My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.”

Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?”

Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death.”

So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

1 SAMUEL 19:1–7 

*Before long, Saul jealously turned against David again and threw a spear at David with the intent of killing him. David escaped and found himself on the run. It appears the purpose of this hardship in David’s life was to give him the opportunity to see God’s hand in his life and to learn to trust God unreservedly. David eventually found his way safely to Jonathan. David apparently wanted to make one more attempt to come alongside Saul and serve him if Saul would accept him. David and Jonathan agreed on a plan to expose the intent of Saul’s heart.*

Then David fled from Natioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, “What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to kill me?”

“Never!” Jonathan replied. “You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn’t do anything, great or small, without letting me know. Why would he hide this from me? It isn’t so!”

But David took an oath and said, “Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, ‘Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.’ Yet as surely

as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.”

Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do for you.”

So David said, “Look, tomorrow is the New Moon feast, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. If your father misses me at all, tell him, ‘David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.’ If he says, ‘Very well,’ then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?”

“Never!” Jonathan said. “If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn’t I tell you?”

David asked, “Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?”

“Come,” Jonathan said, “let’s go out into the field.” So they went there together.

Then Jonathan said to David, “I swear by the LORD, the God of Israel, that I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father intends to harm you, may the LORD deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unfailing kindness like the LORD’s kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family — not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.”

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the LORD call David’s enemies to account.” And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

Then Jonathan said to David, “Tomorrow is the New Moon feast. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty. The

day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel. I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target. Then I will send a boy and say, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to him, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,' then come, because, as surely as the LORD lives, you are safe; there is no danger. But if I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then you must go, because the LORD has sent you away. And about the matter you and I discussed — remember, the LORD is witness between you and me forever."

So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon feast came, the king sat down to eat. He sat in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was empty. Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, "Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean — surely he is unclean." But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?"

Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."

Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die!"

"Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the feast he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, and he said to the boy,

“Run and find the arrows I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. When the boy came to the place where Jonathan’s arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, “Isn’t the arrow beyond you?” Then he shouted, “Hurry! Go quickly! Don’t stop!” The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. (The boy knew nothing about all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, “Go, carry them back to town.”

After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together — but David wept the most.

Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, ‘The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.’” Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

1 SAMUEL 20:1–42

*David was a fugitive on the run from King Saul for several years. While David was hiding from Saul, the Philistines—the same enemy David defeated as a young man—attacked and defeated Israel. Jonathan was killed in battle and Saul took his own life as the enemy closed in on him. A short time later, David was inaugurated as the king of Israel. When David’s kingdom was well established, he demonstrated that he hadn’t forgotten his promise to show kindness to Jonathan’s family by taking care of Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth. In his relationship with both Jonathan and Mephibosheth and throughout his reign as king, David demonstrated his commitment to love God and others.*

*Of course, the ultimate model for a life of love comes from Jesus. He consistently referred to love and grace flowing first from the Father to him and then to us. This is the secret to loving others.*

**✞ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will**

listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

JOHN 10:14–18 

## WHAT WE BELIEVE

*Love is the ultimate expression of becoming like Jesus. God the Father desires for us to unconditionally and sacrificially love others. Biblical love is defined in 1 Corinthians 13 and declared the Great Commandment in Mark 12. To love God and love our neighbor is the standard of God, which on our own we cannot achieve. But in Christ, a new command is issued. God pours his presence and love within us first. Then, as we receive it, we let his love pass through us to others. Jonathan provides a beautiful example of love in his relationship with David. But no one models it better than Jesus himself. With God’s love and presence in us, we can become more and more like Jesus.*

# BELIEVE

POWERED BY  ZONDERVAN

Dear Reader,

Notable researcher George Gallup Jr. summarized his findings on the state of American Christianity with this startling revelation: "Churches face no greater challenge...than overcoming biblical illiteracy, and the prospects for doing so are formidable because **the stark fact is, many Christians don't know what they believe or why.**"

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Imagine thousands of churches and hundreds of thousands of individuals all over the world who will finally be able to declare—**"I know what I believe and why, and in God's strength I will seek to live it out all the days of my life."** It could change the world. It has in the past; it could happen again.

In Him,



Randy Frazee  
General Editor, *Believe*



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As my family and I went through *The Story* together, the more I began to believe and the more real [the Bible] became to me, and ***it rubbed off on my children and helped them with their walk with the Lord.*** *The Story* inspired conversations we might not normally have had.

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—Lynnette Schulz,  
Director of Worship  
Peace Lutheran Church,  
Eau Claire, WI

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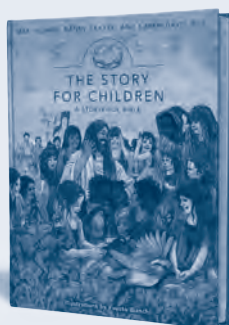
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