



Believe,

Belong,

Become

Riverstone Community Church

First Steps - Discipleship Pathway

BEGIN – Day 1

Welcome! You've started a journey; a new chapter in your life. It's impossible to overstate the importance of this journey – and its one that you've been on for a while without even realising it.

The Bible, the guidebook for life, puts it this way (ignore the colour for now).

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son, so that His Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

(Romans 8:28-29)

That's from a letter written by Paul the Apostle to the Christians in Rome. He wanted them to know not only how awesome it is that we are saved from sin, saved from Hell and saved from punishment, but he wanted them to know how sure they could be that this was all real and solid.

Now have another read of those words and as you do you should notice the words that tell us what God has done and the words that talk about what we've done.

When you read the Bible it's great to think that way about the words. Don't be afraid to make notes in your Bible. Underline things, write along the edges, highlight important things – go nuts – it's going to help you right then and there, as well as years later.

To get you started, I've highlighted the parts God does GREEN and the parts that you are responsible for in YELLOW.

As you can see, these two verses are much more about what God has done than what we have done – and that’s just the way it should be.

Really, the first yellow highlight just tells us that we can know for sure that we are saved, and the second yellow highlight reminds us that we “love” God – more than just that we “know” God. Knowing who God is, knowing what Jesus has done, accepting His death on the cross and His resurrection – that’s the knowing part. Loving God, that’s about turning our life over to Him – living for Him. That’s what you did when you decided to become a Christian – a follower of Jesus. Everything else (the green highlights) comes from Him and is about what He’s done.

There’s so much we could say about this part of the Bible but let’s focus on just one thing for now.

Notice the second verse, its number 29 and starts with “God knew His people in advance...” This means that God already knew you, even before you were born, and He knew you would become a follower of His Son, Jesus. Even if that’s all we got from this verse it would be awesome – but notice what God did with that special knowledge. This verse tells us that God made a choice – a choice to start you on a journey to “become like His Son.” This is what we mean when we say you’ve been on this journey for a while without maybe even knowing it.

God’s had His eye on you for a long time, and He’s so pleased that you’ve accepted His Son as your Saviour. But that’s just one step in the larger journey – the path that leads to you being like Jesus. Not in the miracle-working-and-dying-on-the-cross part, but the living-and-loving-like-Jesus part.

That's the journey you've begun and we're here to help – like a local tour guide in unfamiliar territory. This series will help you know more details about what you **Believe** about Jesus, understand what it means to **Belong** to Jesus and the Family of God, and ultimately **Become** like Jesus in the way you live – just like that verse says God intends for you.

Along the way you'll learn about reading the Bible, praying to God, loving Him and the other Christians in your new family, working and serving together, and how you can help other people to come to know and love Him too.

With this book series, you will also have some friends, maybe one person, maybe a group, who you can call on for help, to answer questions, or to contact if something seems confusing. These people are praying for you, and you can ask them to pray about specific things as well.

For now, let's finish this first day with a prayer. You can pray these words to God – who is always listening – or you can talk to God in your own words. When you pray, it doesn't matter where you are or how you do that, or if you pray out loud or just in your thoughts – He can hear you either way. Let's pray now.

Dear Father God, thanks for sending Jesus to die for me, and thanks for forgiving me and accepting me into Your family. Thanks for planning to make me like Your Son. I want to follow You, so help me live each day relying on Your power and goodness. I'm praying in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflecting – Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts or questions.

Can you think of some of the steps and influences that led you to the point of accepting Jesus Christ? Who were the people or events that touched your life along the way? Can you see how God has been at work?

What questions do you have as a result of this first study? Is there anything you'd like to understand more, or is there anything that seems confusing?

If you were to see Jesus right now, what question would you ask Him, or what would you say to Him? (You can be totally honest with God, he doesn't mind questions)

BELIEVE – Day 2

You've already taken this first step, when you gave your life to Jesus, but we're revisiting this here to start building a firm and solid foundation for your Christian life. The Christian faith is a strong, logical, historical, realistic worldview, so it's important to know what you believe. But it's also a relationship, between you and God, so it's important to know that you're not just believing something *about* Jesus, you are believing *in* Jesus.

When we use the word, "Believe" we're talking about Faith. Faith is one of those keywords for the Christian life. But faith is also a normal part of life. When we board an airplane, we are exercising faith that the pilot will get us to our destination. Even when we sit on a chair, we're exercising faith that it will hold us. Faith is about the strength or reliability of the thing we're having faith in. In Christianity, we're exercising faith in Jesus – the Son of God, so it's important to understand all that this includes.

Firstly, why Believe the Bible? There's lots of great info written about this, and you can read books like "The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel, or "Cold Case Christianity" by J. Werner Wallace to get a very full and complete answer. It's good to do this, because it helps you to recognise the errors in the writings of those who try to discredit the Bible or undermine its truth. For our purposes here, though, this is a brief list of ways the Bible shows its reliability and truthfulness:

1. The Historical accuracy of the Bible sets it apart as one of the most reliable records of human history.
2. The Prophetic accuracy of the Bible demonstrates that it was written by the God who knows the future.
3. The evidence for Creative Design from the smallest particle, your DNA and cells, to the largest cluster of galaxies and

everything in between aligns perfectly with the Bible's position that God created the world.

4. The evidence of Changed and Transformed Lives throughout history supports the truth that Christianity is a real and reliable way of living.
5. The Satisfactory Answers to the Big Questions of purpose and meaning in life make Christianity the most stable and sensible worldview.
6. Christianity's Explanation and Solution to the universal problem of evil (the Bible calls this "Sin") makes it the most logical worldview choice.

So, what is it, exactly, that the Bible says we must believe?

Have a look at these verses from John's record of the life and work of Jesus.

³⁰ The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

(John 20:30-31)

This historical narrative, John's biography of Jesus, finishes with these words. It was John's intention that his book be read and understood to teach enough about Jesus so that you could have eternal life.

Again, you can see the parts that God has done highlighted in GREEN. These are the miracles that showed that Jesus is God's Son, and that He can grant us eternal life.

Also, you can see highlighted in **YELLOW** the parts that are our responsibility, that is, believing in Jesus. So, it's by believing that Jesus is who He said He is, and believing He did what He said He would do, that we are saved.

So, who is He & what did He do?

1. Jesus is God's Son – meaning He is God.
This is a very important part of understanding the gospel, and it's foundational to get that right because it means Jesus was sinless.
2. Jesus was human – just like us in every way except one.
Jesus was born as a baby into the human race to a human mother, but not from a human father, so he didn't inherit the human trait of sin. However, he had to become human so that it was possible for him to die.
3. Jesus died on a cross – making His innocent death a means by which God could take payment for our sin. Without this, our sin is still our problem.
4. Jesus rose again – coming back from death to life on the third day to give us the promise of a new, eternal life.

It's in understanding, believing and accepting these things that we gain eternal life – in other words, this is the gospel (which just literally means “good news”) about how God has saved us through His Son, Jesus. Over the next few days, we're going to explore these elements to really appreciate what we have.

However, there's one more thing that all of this teaches us about God. He loves you. God is so loving that the Bible says, “God IS love” (1st John 4:8). His love for you is the reason Jesus lived to die. His love is the reason you can know you are accepted. His love is the reason you can be adopted into His family.

Let's finish with another prayer.

Dear Father God, I'm amazed by this plan you made to rescue me and so thankful that I've got Jesus in my life. Thank you for your amazing and unlimited love for me. Help me to understand and appreciate you more and more each day. I'm praying in Jesus' name. Amen

Reflecting – Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts or questions.

What do you think is the most difficult part of Jesus' life to comprehend, that He's God, that He's human, or that He's both at the same time? Why is that?

Why do you think God wanted to rescue you, and why did you choose to accept that offer?

Who do you know that doesn't know Jesus? Take a few moments to ask God to reach out to these people and ask God to show you how you can help them to come to know Jesus too.

BELIEVE (continued) – Day 3

Jesus was about 30 years old when He started his important work of teaching and doing miracles. He did this ministry for 3 years before fulfilling His ultimate task of saving us by dying on the cross. John was one of Jesus' closest friends on earth and was with Him during that time. Yesterday we looked at the very end of John's Gospel ("John's good news"). Today, we'll look at the start of John's gospel. Find John chapter 1, verse 1 (ask for help if you don't know how to find that yet), and read the first 5 verses, from "In the beginning..." up to the bit about the darkness failing to "extinguish" or "overcome" the light.

This section is a profound part of the Bible, and you might have realised the first few words "In the Beginning" are the same as the opening words of the whole Bible, where we read "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." So, this is all about God and how everything got here. If you go ahead and use our Green highlight technique here you'd end up with a whole mass of green, because pretty much the entire paragraph is all about God's work.

A little digression here for a moment. For the past 100 or so years, there's been some internal conflict in parts of the scientific community. Sometimes it's portrayed that all scientists know and agree on subjects like where everything came from, how the universe came into being, and how humans got here. The truth is that there is huge division amongst scientists about these things.

Some insist that the "big bang" brought all the beauty and order of the universe into existence, and that random chance mutations over millions of years brought humans from slime to song-writers and molecules to musicians. However, many other scientists (not just the Christian ones) insist that there is so much evidence of design that only a supreme designer could have done it.

It is a fascinating subject to study in greater detail than we have time for in this book. It's very important for us to remember that while nobody can reproduce, in scientific experiments, the original and unrepeatable moments of creation (so we can't *prove* creation or *prove* the big bang), there is very strong evidence for a creator God, just like we read in the Bible.

In fact, logic tends to lead to the conclusion that there must have been a creator God, outside of time, space and matter, that made everything. Scientists call this the "First Cause" as it relates to the well-known principles of cause and effect. A very good resource in this area is the creation.com website, where you can type questions into the search bar and get great answers by qualified scientists with doctoral degrees and huge amounts of experience in their fields of study.

The bottom line is that it's quite reasonable and rational to believe in a creator God, and you've got strong evidence behind you in this matter. Ok, back to the Bible. Here is the first verse from John.

¹In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

(John 1:1)

Notice it's basically in three parts. Let's look at each of these parts and see what we can learn.

1. The "Word" is eternal

The first phrase introduces us to something or someone called "The Word" and tells us that whoever this is has been there since before the beginning of time. Since the "Word" existed before time, space and matter, it must be eternal, and outside of time, space and matter. This fits the definition of "God."

2. The “Word” was with God

Now we’re told that the “Word” was with God. This is also super important. The “Word” is eternal, but also distinct from God. So, we’re talking about distinguishable things, that is, the “Word” and “God” are able to be identified as distinct from one another.

3. The “Word” was God

Finally the third piece of the puzzle. The “Word” which fits the definition of God, is *with* God but also *is* God.

How can this be? At this point we need to introduce a concept that is difficult to grasp. The Bible speaks of God in a singular sense (that is, One God) and a plural sense at the same time. If we take the whole teaching of the Bible, we find the concept which theologians describe as a “Trinity” or that God is Three-In-One.

For example, even in the first verse of the Bible we read “In the beginning God created...” This section of the Bible was originally written in the Hebrew language and uses a specific word for “God.” The word is *Elohim* and is a plural word. Yet the Bible clearly states that there is only one God and that there are no others. The Bible does not mean “gods.”

We are right to understand that “God” means the One and Only, even though the word is plural. Later in verse 26 we read, “and God said, ‘Let Us make man in our image...’” The word “Us” means this One Being is in conversation.

The God of the Bible is a unique being in all the universe; indeed He is greater than the universe He created. He is the only triune being. Throughout the Bible we meet The One and Only God as Father, Son and Spirit. God the Father is often simply referred to as God or “The Lord” or “Father.”

Not only is the Son mentioned and promised throughout the Bible, but we are then introduced to this Son as the one called Jesus. He's also called Lord, and many theologians believe that any mention of "The Angel of the Lord" prior to Jesus' birth is talking about the same person.

Finally, the Spirit is sometimes called the "Holy Spirit" or the "Spirit of the Lord" or even the "Spirit of Jesus." The point is that they are all co-equally God, and all are seen to be active in Divine ways, that is, the three exhibit the same "God Nature" as each other.

The ancient people, like Egyptians, the Nordic people, the Greeks and Romans had their gods, but they were thought of as merely super-human. Like us but more powerful although still with their failings and squabbles. Western society inherited some of this thinking, which is why we have The Hulk, Superman, and not surprisingly, Thor.

But the real God is nothing like that. The One we follow is infinite in His power, knowledge, wisdom, mercy and love. He's beyond comprehension and full of compassion. There is no one like our God, and there is no one like Jesus! Any attempts to compare God with the gods thought up by human beings will fall far short of what He is really like.

So, to understand God He has given us the Bible. It is His preferred method of sharing His love, His plans, His power, His character and nature with us.

Let's finish with talking to this awesome Father.

Dear God, it is amazing to think about You, existing as Father, Son and Spirit, creating all the beauty around me, even that You thought about me and loved me. I'm thankful for the Bible, and for Jesus dying for me. Amen.

Reflecting – Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts or questions.

Have you ever wondered where the universe came from? Or what about the things we can't measure, like love, or evil? How does it change your perspective if the universe was deliberately planned and made, as opposed to arriving by chance and accident?

Sometimes, without even realizing it, we can put limitations on God. We might think "Oh, sure God could do *this*, like save me, but I don't know if He could do *that*, like help my family." What are some things that seem "too hard" or "too big" that you'd like to ask about?

What is something new you learned to appreciate about God today?

BELIEVE (continued) – Day 4

Yesterday we were introduced to the Triune God – the Father, Son (Jesus) and Spirit; all equally God by definition and nature and power. Today we continue with unpacking what it means to Believe by looking closer at Jesus being fully human.

To do that we're going back to the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

If you remember we read 5 verses which ended with the “Word” bringing the light of life, and that the light shined in the darkness. The next few verses speak about a man called John (a different John from the one who wrote the book) who came to point everyone to the “Word”, or the “Light.” John wrote that the “true light was coming into the world.” But how would God come into the world and how would we recognise Him?

Later in the same chapter you should find verse 14. In that verse we read, “the Word became human and made His home among us.” So, the plan would be that God the Word, distinct from God the Father, would have to become human. Then John continued to describe this One as demonstrating the “glory of the Father’s One and Only Son.”

Finally, in verse 18 we read, “No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.” In case there’s any confusion, in verse 17 of this chapter, and also in verses 29 and 34 of the next chapter, John clearly identifies Jesus as the same “One” of verse 18. It’s very clear that the “Word”, the “True Light”, the “Son of God”, the revelation of God, the “One who is himself God” and Jesus the man are all one and the same person.

Now why is this so important? Good question. The Bible teaches that God is Holy – that means more than just good, more than even just perfect, it means so pure that nothing in all the universe is like Him. He lives in heaven, which is also pure, so that nothing with even the tiniest spot of sin will be able to live there with Him forever. We've got to grasp how holy God really is, otherwise, we might unintentionally downgrade Him in our thoughts, or maybe upgrade our purity in our own estimation.

Now the problem isn't with God's holiness, but with our imperfection, our sin. When someone commits a crime, we would expect that a fair and just legal system would demand a penalty. Similarly, God, who is the most fair and reasonable judge of all, demands a penalty for our sin. Sadly, that penalty is death. It means that we can't live forever with God in heaven – our sin makes us ineligible to enter – so all the attempts of humans to live forever or work their way into heaven by trying to do enough good things to outweigh the bad will ultimately fail.

But does God leave us to this fate, even though we deserve it? No, He doesn't. See, God absolutely holy, but He's also completely loving, so He wants to provide a solution. The penalty for sin must be paid by someone. I would have to die for my own sin, so I can't die for you and you can't die for me. What we need is someone to die for us who doesn't have any of their own sin to deal with.

The brilliant answer to the dilemma is Jesus. As God He is perfect – He never sinned. As man He is human, so it's possible for Him to die. Because He died unjustly, God the Father now has a means of paying for sin. So, Jesus' death can become a substitution for your sin debt and my sin debt. Since Jesus is both Man and God, He can take our place.

If He's just a man, then He has His own sin debt, inherited from His human father. If He's purely God but not Man, then He can't die. But Jesus is both – Man and God.

We've seen that Jesus is God, but how do we know He's really human? Aside from John Chapter 1 making that clear, we see lots of evidence that Jesus was human. Here's a few samples.

1. Jesus had a human birth. Luke 2:7 describes the event which, aside from the location being a lamb birthing cave instead of a hospital, is familiar to everyone who's witnessed a normal birth.
2. Jesus was a human child. Luke 2:21 & 22 describe Jesus being circumcised. This was a very normal Jewish practice for 8-day-old boys.
3. Jesus had a human family. Matthew 13:55 lists Jesus' mother, four brothers and at least two sisters and mentions Joseph's job as being a carpenter.
4. Jesus touched people, so he had a normal, physical body. This is not "touched" in an emotional sense, like, "that song touched my heart" but in a very real sense. In Matthew 8:3 we read that Jesus, "reached out his hand and touched the man."
5. Jesus experienced hunger, thirst and tiredness. Matthew 4:2, John 19:28 and John 4:6 show these human traits.
6. Jesus experienced temptation. Matthew 4:1 describes a very difficult time of temptation, but remember He never gave in to temptation. Temptation isn't sin, but giving in to temptation, that is, doing what we are tempted to do, is sin. Hebrews 4:15 shows us that Jesus understands this human weakness, but never sinned. Not a wrong thought, not a wrong word, not a wrong action.

7. Jesus showed emotion. In Luke 19:41 and John 11:35 we have two occasions when Jesus cried. In John 2:15 & 16 we see Jesus displaying anger. In Matthew 9:36 Jesus expressed compassion and in John 12:27 we read Jesus' heart was troubled as He contemplated that He was headed for the cross.
8. While on earth He prayed. Hebrews 5:7 tells us Jesus prayed often, sometimes with tears, and the whole of John Chapter 17 is a prayer Jesus prayed to His Father in Heaven.
9. Jesus suffered pain. After being beaten and whipped (John 19:33) Jesus wasn't even able to carry His own cross. Luke 23:26 states that they found a man called Simon who was coming in from the countryside and made him carry the cross of Jesus.
10. Jesus died. John 19:33&34 describes the medical evidence for Jesus' death. When the spear pierced Jesus' side, it cut the pericardial sack around the heart, which had filled with clear fluid gathered from the hypovolemic shock of death by crucifixion. The flow of "blood and water" recorded by John as an eyewitness matches what cardiologists know would have happened. John was no cardiologist, but he was an accurate historian.
11. Jesus had a human body, even after His resurrection. Luke 24:30 says Jesus broke a piece of bread and handed it to two of His followers. In verse 39 Jesus offered the disciples to touch His hands and feet which still bore the marks of crucifixion and verse 42 records Jesus eating fish.

It is very clear that this unique man in history is both God and yet at the same time fully human.

As we learned already it would take this very special combination to save humanity from its well-deserved destiny in Hell. Jesus as God never sinned but had to be born as a human in order to be able to be killed, and then, because He never stopped being God, was resurrected.

There is a very special verse in the Bible that explains how Jesus being both God and human helps us with our sin problem. This verse has been called “The Great Exchange” – you’ll see why in a moment.

²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

Notice that this entire verse is highlighted in **GREEN** because this verse is totally about what God has done and nothing about what we have done. So, God the Son, Jesus, was put on the cross, where he died without ever having said, done or thought even one thing that was sinful. This injustice meant that his underserved death becomes available to pay for your sin and my sin – everyone’s sin as it turns out. When we choose to believe in Jesus, in his death and resurrection, God lets Jesus’ death pay for sin – but then not only does our sin end up on Jesus, his perfect sinlessness (the Bible calls this “righteousness”) is given to us.

This is why it is called “The Great Exchange.” Our sin transferred on to Jesus while his righteousness is transferred to us. This is the legal swap that allows us to be forgiven without us having to earn it. When Jesus died on the cross, one of the things he called out was “It is Finished!” This word in the original Greek language is something you could write on an account when it is all paid up. Like a debt being paid off. Forgiveness is free for us, but cost Jesus his life.

Remember, Jesus didn't stay dead, so here's a bonus to spin your mind:

1. God the Father raised Jesus. Acts 5:30 says, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus."
2. God the Spirit raised Jesus. Romans 8:11 teaches that the Spirit of God, since He raised Jesus from the dead, will also raise you up one day from death.
3. God the Son, Jesus, raised Himself. In John 10:17&18 Jesus told His disciples that He had the power to raise Himself, and in John 2:19 He predicted that this is exactly what He would do. And He did!

Let's finish with prayer and a few questions to think about.

Dear Jesus, I'm praying to You today, my Saviour and my friend. You know exactly what it's like to experience sadness and hunger and loss and grief and pain. I know You can relate to all I'm going through. On top of that, You said "No" to sin throughout Your entire life, and then allowed evil men to kill You, all so that You could save me. It's hard to express my thankfulness for all You've done, so please accept this prayer, which I'm offering to You now. Thanks for loving me to death, literally Your death. Thanks for rising from death and giving me a whole new life. This I pray, in your own name, Jesus. Amen.

Reflecting – Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts or questions.

Is there something about Jesus’ human life that puzzles you? Write down that question or questions here and ask your Christian friends about it.

The other day you wrote down some people you know who don’t know Jesus. Have you remembered to pray for them, and for God to give you an opportunity to show them what you’ve discovered? What’s one thing you’ve discovered that you’d love to share with just one other person who doesn’t know Jesus?

BELONG – Day 5

So far, we've looked at what it means to Believe. This is just the start. You should never stop expanding this foundation. What you Believe will increase as you discover more and more about our awesome God. What you Believe will grow, not change as you learn more about all He's done and all He's got in store for you.

Visually it looks like this:

(continuing to infinity...)



BELIEVE

There's a point in time, a moment in your history, when you decided to believe. Colossians 2:6 begins with "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord..." So, that was an event which was planned before the start of the world and took place at one moment in one location. Maybe you were with someone else who helped you express the words, maybe you came to a realisation yourself and cried out to God, but that moment happened. But notice that verse up there leaves us hanging like a musician who leaves out the final note of a song? Let's see where it leads when we let Colossians 2:6 play out.

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him"

There's more, much more to the Christian life than just a "Get Out Of Hell Free" card. Once you've started to Believe, that will continue into eternity, but now we want to add the next level.



BELONG



BELIEVE

So today let's explore what it means to Belong to Jesus.

First let's clarify what we're NOT talking about. We're not talking about Belonging to a church or a particular denomination. It's true that we belong to "Riverstone Community Church" and that we're part of a denomination called the "Christian Brethren." But that's just a tiny part, and it's not important really. We're also not talking about belonging to a few Christian friends in a group that meets once a week in a home or in the church. What is important is that you learn what it means to Belong to Christ. This "Belonging" operates in three ways.

POSITIONALLY

The Bible talks about our new position, or where we stand in relation to God. It uses the phrase "in Christ" or "united with Christ."

The apostle Paul wrote these words to explain the move:

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶ For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 2:4-6)

Notice that verse 6 tells us we're seated with Him (Jesus) in the heavenly realms. But physically we know we're still here on earth. How does that work? Our Christian life has this wonderful "already happened / not yet complete" dual aspect. The Bible speaks of things which are, and things which will be.

For example, when God looks at us now, we appear perfect and without any sin, but we know that we can still sometimes be guilty of breaking God’s rules. However, since God sees us as already clean because of Jesus we don’t have to do any penance or payment. We can just ask for forgiveness and the strength to say “no” to sin in the future and know that it’s already given.

In the same way, even while we’re still walking around on earth, God sees us and treats us as special guests, sitting in the seat where Jesus sits, right next to the throne of God the Father. Can you imagine a better seating position in all the universe? God considers us right now how we will be physically in the future. It’s that “already happened / not yet complete” process.

RELATIONALLY

We have come into a new relationship when we Belong to Jesus. That new relationship is described in the Bible as a family. Specifically, the “Family of God.”

Paul wrote this in a very tender way:

⁵God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

(Ephesians 1:5)

This means we weren’t born into God’s family to start with – we were born into a human family. But now we are adopted by God, our new Father. Also, if you look back at the first day of this booklet, on Page 2, you will read that Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. So, Jesus in this sense is our big brother. But it also means that we are brothers and sisters to each other.

The church is made up of your new adopted family, and just like families are supposed to do, we care for one another.

Paul wrote to church about how we should treat each other:

²⁵ This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honoured, all the parts are glad. ²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

(1 Corinthians 12:25-27)

Notice the change of colour here? The fact that God's work produces harmony in the church should then be lived out by how we treat each other, so this is something we are responsible to do. Since you have now joined God's family, we love you and care for you. If you have something that's weighing you down or worrying you, we'd love to know so we can pray for you and perhaps even help. If something in your life is a great success or joy, we'd also love to know so we can celebrate with you.

This love for one another isn't just an optional extra for Christians, it's something Jesus commanded in John 13:34-35. The reason given by Jesus in these verses is so that the rest of the world around us would see and know that we are different. This is why we said earlier that we don't belong to a church or a group. We belong to God, and just like natural children look like their parents, God wants us to start to look like Him. God is perfectly loving, and so we should be like that.

In our church family, we have several ways of showing love for one another. We spend time together outside of church on Sunday morning and we have small groups that meet in homes.

One of the most effective ways we can care for one another is prayer. If you want prayer then just ask, and we'll talk to Father God for you and with you. You aren't supposed to do life alone, and we don't want you to feel alone.

PRACTICALLY

This leads us to the third way we Belong to Christ. "Positionally" God sees us already perfect, "Relationally" we're adopted into God's family and are brothers and sisters, and "Practically" we work together in God's great plan.

Something else from Paul (he wrote nearly half the New Testament, so there's lots from him):

⁴Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function,⁵ so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

(Romans 12:4-5)

There's a few metaphors for the Christian Church listed in the Bible. We've been talking about families, now we're talking about a body.

A body only functions properly when all the parts are working well together. If I hurt my right foot, then I might limp and lean on my left foot. After a while, it's going to get worn out, plus my back might be affected. If I'm blind, then I have to compensate with the sense of touch and hearing. And so it is with the Christian Church as a Body.

The Bible says that each of us has tasks and roles, and when we all fulfill our purpose then the body functions well. If one part isn't doing its job then the other parts are affected. This is what it means to, as Paul puts it, "belong to each other."

So if I consider that I belong to you and you belong to me, then I realise I have a responsibility to love and care for you, because Belonging to Christ means we're literally all in this together.

Dear Jesus, it's so great to realise that when you saved me, you didn't just wipe away sin and that's all, but you adopted me into the family of God. So I want to thank you that I now belong to you. Thank you that God the Father sees me as perfect, thank you that you are my brother, and thank you for bringing me into a new family – one that will last for all eternity. Help me to start to see my Christian friends as my brothers and sisters. Help me to see how I help the body of Christ to work better. This I pray, in your own name, Jesus. Amen.

Reflecting – Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts or questions.

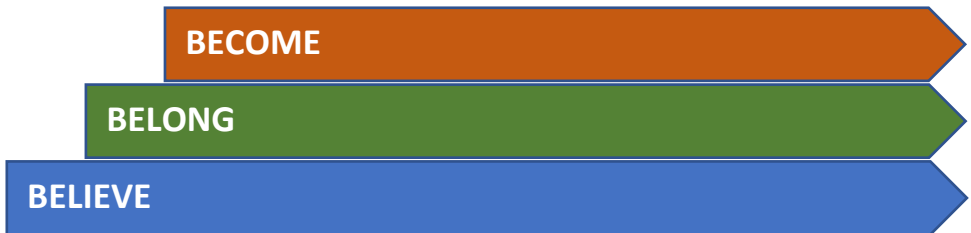
Have you thought about what sorts of gifts and talents you might have been given that could be of service to God's family and work? Jot down some ideas to discuss with your Christian friends.

BECOME – Day 6

You’ve nearly reached the first week of your lifelong discipleship pathway. We hope that this has been an awesome process of discovery. Remember that this is a journey and you will continue to grow each day as you walk with Jesus.

Remember that Believing is just the first step, and that even this week you have uncovered even more about the amazing truth of what happened when you were forgiven for your sin, made clean in God’s sight, and adopted into God’s Family. Also, along the way you’ve learnt that this means you Belong to Jesus, and as a result we Belong to each other. Today we’re going to consider the overall goal of that journey.

Let’s go back to our simple diagram and add the next level.



Believe in Jesus, Belong to Jesus, Become like Jesus. That final level is the ultimate purpose, the ultimate goal of the Christian life.

At this point you might be saying, “What? I can’t be like Jesus! That’s impossible!” and you would be right – sort of.

Yes, there’s only ONE Jesus. The Bible says He’s unique in all the universe. Nobody else is God who became Man. Nobody else has been a sinless human. Nobody else has died to take my place. Nobody else was the first to resurrect themselves to create a whole new possible reality. And yet, the Bible says Christlikeness is the goal.

Consider what Paul wrote in his letter to the Roman Christians.

²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

(Romans 12:4-5)

So here, again, we have one of those God-does-everything verses. That's really important to keep in mind because if we're talking about becoming like Jesus, well, that's not something we can do for ourselves. But also notice that this is God's goal for you. This isn't some nice idea that people thought up. Some religions teach that sort of process, where you are supposed to become elevated in your understanding or spirituality or psychological attitude to achieve some sort of peak. No, nobody can elevate themselves. This is a God-thing. Christlikeness is His work in you, not your work in you.

However, while this is God's work, we are in partnership. God doesn't force His will on you, so let's look at the balance and how this works.

First, the Instruction:

⁶ Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

(1st John 2:6)

This was written by John, the same John who we read from earlier in the week. Now, instead of writing about Jesus, he's writing about us.

If we say we're a Christian, a Follower, a Disciple of Jesus, then there's someone we should look like – Jesus. We're told to love like Him, live like Him, and look like Him in how we walk and talk.

In the coming weeks we'll explore more of what this means to be a disciple. But the question really comes down to how. How can Christians "live their lives as Jesus did?" That brings us to...

The Inspiration:

¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

(Philippians 2:13)

Paul tells us the secret. God is at work in you. It's not you that brings about the change, it is God, and He does it in two ways.

Firstly, He gives you the desire to do what pleases Him. By ourselves we might want to live like Jesus, but that human-generated enthusiasm only goes so far. God knew this. History is littered with the devastated desires of well-intentioned people. We all know how long most New Year's Resolutions last. Don't be embarrassed, we're all in the same boat. Instead, God wants to inspire our hearts. It's genius, really. But if the only thing God did for us was give us the desire to be like Jesus, we'd be pretty frustrated followers. Fortunately, He didn't stop there.

He also gives us the power to do what pleases Him. This word, "power" is the Greek word for "energy." It's God that makes it possible to do what God gives us the desire to do. We still have to be willing, and draw on that strength each day, but God's intervention is what makes it possible to Become like Jesus.

God's Intention is for you to Become like Jesus, His Instruction is for you to Become like Jesus, and His Inspiration is to help you Become like Jesus. Remember, it's a partnership – you and Jesus – that's a pretty good team. So, let's continue to spend time with God, reading His Word and praying.

Let's finish this day with another prayer.

Dear Jesus, so, wow. Become like you? Since that is what you want, it's what I want, but I need your help. I need help to keep my focus on You. I need Help to make choices that please You. I need help to rely on You for every day. I know it's going to be a lifelong process, but I want to live like You and love like You. I know you have given me your Holy Spirit, so please help me to listen and act according to Your plans. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflecting:

Are there any areas of your life that you think might not be pleasing to God?

Ask God for specific direction. What's one thing God wants you to start to change first?

A LIVING SACRIFICE – Day 7

It's been a week since we began this journey and we've covered a huge amount of territory. We've talked about the seismic change that has occurred in your life and the start of the journey from here. Today, let's pick up on the final piece of the puzzle that sets the attitude and altitude of your life.

Romans is one of Paul's great letters, which we've already used plenty of times. Over half of the letter is what we call "Theology" which is knowledge about God. But at chapter 12 he takes a sudden turn and starts to talk about "Practice" – how we live out our lives in the light of the great truths he presented. So, at the start of chapter 12 he wrote:

¹ And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

(Romans 12:1-2)

Let's figure out what it means to be "a living sacrifice." A sacrifice means giving up something. We use the term "Salary Sacrifice" when talking about superannuation, and we have a phrase "it's not a big sacrifice" when we want to say something isn't a problem. The greatest sacrifice that was ever made was when Jesus gave up His life for us on the cross – to pay for our sin.

But when we talk about being a “living sacrifice” it’s obviously not about us giving up our lives. It’s more about how we live our lives.

To some other Christians Paul wrote,

“Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So, you must honour God with your body.”

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

It’s part of what it means to Belong to Jesus. So being a living sacrifice means He’s in charge of my life now. This is a great thing though, because who better to direct the course of your life than the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving King of the universe? So then Paul goes on to tell us what God wants to do.

He wants to transform your life, and He’ll do it by transforming your thinking. We’ve already hinted at how this begins, and it’s got several components which will become more obvious as we continue into the next books in this series. Just like Believe, Belong & Become form the background thinking, there are some simple steps, or really “rhythms” that form the pattern of our Christian lives.

First, we Gather.

We Gather with Jesus every day. We read the Bible to discover more and more about Him and all He’s done. We learn about ourselves and God’s plans for the world.

We Gather with Jesus to pray. Just like His first disciples did, around a campfire on a beach, while walking along a road, while He was teaching crowds of people, we gather and talk to Him by praying.

We Gather with other Christians in small home groups. It's here that we develop strong friendships and can support one another while we learn what it means to be a disciple.

We Gather together as a whole church, at least once a week, to worship God, to encourage each other, to remember Jesus' sacrifice in the Communion and to hear teaching from God's Word – the Bible.

Second, we Grow.

We Grow in our understanding, in our commitment, in our service, in our friendships. It's in the home groups that we'll grow the most. Remember our intention is to Become like Jesus, and we need help and support and encouragement in this.

Third, we Give.

This is about being a living sacrifice, about serving together, about giving back to God. Considering the price He paid, it's right that we give back to him, emotionally, physically, financially.

Fourth, we Go.

Jesus left his first disciples a command, which was to go into all the world and make disciples. This is something that we should continue until he returns, but for it to continue it has to be repeated. So let's introduce an important concept here. Jesus doesn't just want disciples; He wants disciples who make disciples who make disciples. God's intention for you is that you continue the process that He started in you.

So where to from here? Well, you will be catching up with someone, or maybe a group of new Christian friends, so get together and talk about what you've learned. Also, don't be afraid to ask questions.

If you haven't read it yet, grab a copy of the Welcome to Riverstone Community Church booklet and start to connect with other people at the church. This booklet, along with a lot of resources and info can be found on the Rivochurch.com website, and your friends will help you with anything you need like that.

There are more books to follow this one as you continue your journey along the discipleship pathway, and there's so much more to discover about what it means to follow Jesus – like baptism, communion, sharing your faith and experiencing personal growth.

But now, as always, let's finish by talking to God and reflecting on what we've learned.

Dear Jesus, I worship You as the King of the Universe, as the One who took my sin, and as my friend. There is no one like You and there is no way I could ever repay all Your kindness to me. My life is Yours to lead. Help me each day to grow closer to You, and along the way, help me become like you, I pray this in your powerful name. Amen.

Reflecting:

What is your biggest question at this moment?



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Believe,

Belong,

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First Steps - Discipleship Pathway

Book 1