



NEW BELIEVER CLASS.

Part I

What is Missing in our Lives?

Purpose, meaning, a reason for living – these are all things we desire and search for in life. A God-shaped vacuum of sorts that nothing on earth seems to fill. The good news is that God made a way for us, the bad news is that we have a serious problem we face. The problem “sin.”

The bible clearly identifies the problem as sin. Sin isn't just an act but the actual nature of our being. In other words, we are not sinners because we sin, rather, we sin because we are sinners! (Psalm 51:5). Since we are born sinners, sinning comes naturally to us. According to the word, “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” (Jeremiah 17:9) We are not basically good...but basically sinful. “When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned...Yes, Adam's once sin brings condemnation for everyone.” (Romans 5:12,18)

“Woe, that's not fair!” you say, why should we suffer because of what Adam did? Yet, given the opportunity, each of us would have done the same thing. God has given us the freedom to choose between two paths, one leads to life and one to death. The Bible says, “ Today, I give you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses” and goes on to say, “oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Without a leg to stand on: Someone may say, “I live a good life and follow the ten commandments,” really? The truth is that the ten commandments were laws given to help us shut our mouths and show us how desperately we need God's help and forgiveness.

- We all missed the mark (Roman's 3:23), “we have all sinned.” “No one is righteous - not even one” (Romans 3:10). Another word for righteous would be “good,” or “one who is as he or she ought to be, “ in inner character reference and not just outward behavior. Sin is derived from the Greek word “Hamartia,” is to miss the mark, and as perfection goes we really missed the mark by a mile.
- Sin is a deliberate act, (Ephesians 2:1-3) another word for sin is “transgressions” or “trespass” which is an action that we choose to do. If we protest this point, we only fool ourselves (1 John 1:8).
- The ultimate penalty for sin is death. (Romans 6:23) “The wages of sin is death, “ in other words we have earned the penalty of death, which is eternal torment and punishment in a place called Hell.

The Solution: Jesus Christ

Good news, God understood the problem and knew we could do nothing about it. Because he loves us, he sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to bridge the chasm of sin that separates us from him.

Why Jesus can bridge the Gap?

There has never been anyone like Jesus. Supernaturally conceived in the womb of a young teenage virgin named Mary. Through this supernatural conception, Jesus, who is fully God, also became fully human. He lay aside the privileges of his deity to live on earth as a man. (Philippians 2:7-8) he “humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.” Moreover, he came to this earth with a clear objective in mind: to bridge that gap between God and us.

When the Israelites of the Old Testament sinned, they had a high priest go into the Temple and offer an animal sacrifice to God to atone for their sins. Why? The bible teaches “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22) These rituals in the O.T. were a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do on the cross for us once and for all. The Great Exchange to bridge the gap. In fact, Jesus plainly told the disciples that it was necessary for him to suffer, die, and on the third day he would be raised from the dead. (Matthew 16:21) He was eventually arrested on false charges after Judas Iscariot, one of his own disciples, betrayed him. In essence, with one hand Jesus took hold of a

Holy God, and with the other hand he took hold of the sinful human race. As crude nails were pounded into his hands, he bridge the gap for us! Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead.

We put Jesus on the Cross.

The necessity of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross shows just how radical our situation was as fallen people. It really wasn't the roman soldiers or the Jewish leaders that put him on the cross, Jesus came to save us. It was our sins that made it necessary for Jesus to volunteer for this torturous and humiliating death.

Let's read some verses to see exactly what Jesus did for us:

1. **The Greatest demonstration of Love** (Romans 5:6-8). Jesus didn't die for us while we were his friends, but while we were still sinners and enemies of God, but demonstrated his love for us by dying on the cross. Jesus died, not just for "all of us," but for us as individuals. As Paul writes, "Christ loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20). It was love that held Jesus to the cross, not nails.
2. **Forsaken that we might be Forgiven** (Luke 23:32-49) Many of us have read the story, but this was not just a good teacher dying for his beliefs, it was God in human form who hung on the cross, bridging the gap between a sinful people and a holy God. Matthew's Gospel tells us that when Jesus hung on that cross he cried out "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matt 27:46). Many scholar's believe those words marked the precise moment when God placed the sins of the world upon his Son. For that reason God had to "turn his face" and pour out his wrath upon his own Son. On the cross Jesus received the wages that were due to each of us.
3. **Christ, the Sole Mediator** (1 Timothy 2:5-6) Why is Jesus the only mediator between God and people? Aren't there a lot of qualified mediator's and religious leaders who have claimed to have the way to God? Haven't some of them even died as a result of their message? The truth is that not one of these other leaders was fully God and fully human. That is why Jesus is uniquely qualified to deal with sin. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). Acts 4:12 tells us, "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." Oh, and Jesus also rose from the dead!

The Response to accept God's Offer:

There are two things you must do to enter into a relationship with the God who you have been separated from:

1. **Change direction from your sins.** As Jesus began his public ministry, his first message was "Repent of your sins," (Mark 1:15) in essence, Jesus was telling the people to do a complete turn-around back towards him; to acknowledge their sinful behavior, change their minds and the direction of their lives. We must also change our lifestyle, the scripture teaches, "the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin." (2 Corinthians 7:10) We can all agree, when you are really sorry for something you turn from it, and change direction. Paul, the apostle, makes a strong statement to reveal what a big change takes place in your life, "turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me" (Acts 26:18) What great news for us to know, we have an opportunity to respond to what Jesus has already done for us.
2. **Believe in Jesus Christ and receive Him into your life.** After we see the enormity of our separation from God and what sin has done to our lives, we have to then believe in and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. In plain terms, you allow Jesus Christ to be the leader and forgiver of your life. Jesus said you must be "born again," or more literally, "born

from above" (John 3:3) and this spiritual rebirth happens when we personally believe in Jesus and invite him into our lives, and turn from our sins.

Notice something remarkable, this offer is free for the asking, you don't have to clean up first, work for it before you make this decision. "The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) Being a Christian just means having a relationship with the living God. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends." God wants intimacy, closeness, friendship and to connectedness with his sons and daughters. To hear God calling, you must know how he speaks. One of those ways he speaks is in a "still, small voice." Sometimes it is a tugging on your heart and He may be speaking to you right now! It is at that very point you "open the door," only you can do that, as Jesus will never force his way in.

How do I receive Jesus Christ? Here is a simple prayer you can pray:

"God, I am sorry for my sin and I turn from it right now. I thank you for sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for my sins. Jesus, I ask you to come into my heart and life right now, be my Lord and Savior as I know you are the only way, the truth and the life. I ask you to be my forgiver, my leader and friend; help me follow you all the days of my life as your disciple. Thank you for forgiving and receiving me right now. Thank you that my sin is forgiven and that I am going to heaven. In Jesus name I pray. Amen."

What if I am rededicating my life to Jesus Christ? Maybe you are already a Christian, but have strayed from following Jesus. The good news is that he is ready to embrace you with open arms. The word says, "My wayward children...come back to me, and I will heal your wayward hearts." (Jeremiah 3:22) Here is another simple prayer you can pray:

"God, I am sorry for my sin. I am sorry that I have strayed so far from you, forgive me now as I turn from my sin. I don't want to live life my way, but know that only you offer me life to the fullest. Renew and revive me as I once again follow you as my God. Thank you for your forgiveness and friendship. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone, a new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). That is good news and God has changed your eternal destiny, instead of fearing death and eternal condemnation in hell, you will spend eternity with God in heaven and live life to the fullest here on earth. (John 10:10)

What God has Done for You.

So what actually happens when Jesus enters your life? First, he saves you from your sins and the punishment we all deserve as a result of sin – this is called "salvation" or "regeneration," and has to do with what takes place in your heart; God gives you a new life.

Second, he "justifies" you. Justification has to do with your standing before God and includes the complete removal and forgiveness of your sins. God's word tells us, "Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins! Everyone who believes in him is declared right with God (Justified) – something that the law of Moses could never do." (Acts 13:38-39) Speaking of our sins, God says "I will never again remember [your] sins and lawless deeds." (Hebrews 10:17) What a wonderful promise for us!

Justification is not just the removal of guilt and condemnation that accompanies sin, but even more. Since God has removed your sins and forgiven you of them, he has also placed the perfect

righteousness of Jesus Christ “into your account, “ so to speak. You don’t have to earn it or achieve it, it is yours as a gracious gift from the God who loves you.

Let’s try and get a grasp of what “justification” means in the life of a believer:

- **God promises us His gracious forgiveness.** The word, “confess” means to say the same thing as another” or “to agree with.” So to confess means we are simply agreeing with God about our sin, which he already knows. Since God hates sin, when you confess sin, you agree with him and the destructive nature of sin...turn from it and determine to put it out of your life and never to return to it again. (1 John 1:9)
- **God has balanced our Moral and Spiritual Budget.** (Romans 5:1-2) When God makes us right in his sight, he does so by placing all of the righteousness of Christ to our credit. This balances the moral and spiritual budget for us. We now have sufficient “capital of character” to get on with the business of living. It is now up to us, how we want to spend this new life God has given to us. It is the great exchange, Jesus life on the cross for your life, if you are willing to accept it.
- **God calls us His Children.** (Luke 15:11-32) This incredible story illustrates for us what happens when a person turns from sin. Notice that the Father didn’t give the prodigal son what he deserved – banishment. Instead, he met him with open arms and was given what he didn’t deserve – the rights and privileges of full sonship. Likewise, we are called sons and daughters, he doesn’t give us judgement, but gives us forgiveness and justification.

Adopted and Assured.

We have looked at what happens when we are regenerated (when Christ comes into our lives) and when we are justified (when God forgives our sin and puts his righteousness in it’s place). Now, let us see the remarkable change that has taken place for us:

“Adoption” means “to be given the rights of a son,” in essence, you have been given the full rights of sonship in the family of God as though you were born that way. It may be difficult to grasp, but you are a son or daughter of God if you have made a decision to accept Jesus into your life. So what does being a son or daughter of God look like?

- **God disciplines His Children** (Hebrews 12:5-9). Being a child of God is not a distant hope, but a present reality. One of the ways God reminds you of this, is by correcting you and bringing you back into line like a loving father. Before you followed Christ, you may have not felt any sense of guilt for certain things, but now that we are followers of Jesus, God’s Holy Spirit shows us the way to live and you will be more aware of His presence as He guides you, counsels you and corrects you as a loving father would.
- **You have an approachable and Loving Father** (Galatians 4:6). The Aramaic word is translated “dear Father” is “abba,” which is a word of affection that a young child would use endearingly toward his or her father. A western equivalent would be “papa” or “daddy.” God doesn’t want to be viewed as an uninterested and distant father, but as a loving, approachable father to whom you can turn to at any time, because you are his child.
- **His promises are not based on your Feelings.** (1 John 5:11-13) There will be times as a follower of Jesus, that you do not feel his presence. You may be tempted to doubt that he has come into your life. 1 John 5:13 does not say the word “feel” in it. “I write this so that you may know you have eternal life.” Eternal life is yours, stand on God’s promise to you. You are forgiven, justified, adopted, and assured of salvation!

How do I live as a follower of Christ now that I have made my decision to follow?

Jesus says, "Come follow me" to his new disciples and as we read throughout the scriptures, following Christ is "life to the fullest" (John 10:10). This new way of living gives you a new freedom to be the person God made you to be, but that does not mean that all the circumstances around you will suddenly change. Becoming a follower of Christ involves the act of "following" him and the example he left us on how to live. That can be challenging, but God promises to equip us, empower us, and help us along the way.

We have come up with three things found throughout scripture that might help you in your walk with Jesus. As silly as it may sound, we call it the "3 Legged Stool." As you follow Jesus daily, these three things are essential to your spiritual walk. As with any stool, each leg helps support the entire stool.

The 3 legged Stool ::

Pray. "Time in Prayer"

The idea of talking to God can be intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. Prayer is a wonderful experience and the Bible instructs us to pray at all times, in any posture, in any place, for any reason. Jesus would often go off by himself to spend time in prayer with his heavenly father. God desires you pray from a pure and sincere heart, no need for Christian jargon, just be yourself.

- Matthew 6:5-15 – Jesus shows his followers how to pray.
- Romans 8:26-27 – God gave us Holy Spirit to aid us in prayer, even if we don't know what to pray.
- James 4:2-3 – Prayer is God's appointed way for us to relate our concerns and present all of our needs to him.
- James 5:15-16 – When we pray sincerely for forgiveness, God restores us.
- Philippians 4:6-7 – Overcome worry with praying for God's peace.
- Colossians 1:9 – God will give us greater spiritual understanding through prayer.

Read. "Time in God's word"

The Bible is God's word and we consider it the "User manual of life, everything we need to know about God and living a life that pleases him is found in it's pages.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – Study is necessary for our spiritual growth
- Matthew 7:24-27 – Study keeps us spiritually strong
- Colossians 3:16 – God desires that we make it integral part of life
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – We will notice positive changes as we apply scripture

Community. "Time with other believers"

One of the most essential elements to spiritual growth is growing in your journey with Christ with like-minded believers. It may come as a shock to many of you, but the church is not an organization or a building that you meet in, the Bible makes it clear that the church is "a body of believers," that means "the people." The Christian community provides you with spiritual instruction, allows you to worship with other believers, and enables you to use your God-given abilities to build and serve the church. We follow the example of Jesus' life as believers, as he spent time with the disciples, but then spent time building friendships with those far from God; we are to be salt and light to the world and get out of "the salt-shaker."

- Acts 2:42-47 – The first church, a community of believers doing-life together; celebrating, serving, learning, growing and helping the community
- Hebrews 10:25 – Doing-life with Christian friends sharpens our spiritual discernment, helps us grow.
- Ephesians 4:11-16 & 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 – Not only do you benefit from Christian community, but you can use your God-given abilities.

THE BIBLE :: simple guide

Old Testament – there are 39 books in the Old Testament, before Jesus, written about the promises between God and the Israelites

Historical – books concerning the history of Israel, God's chosen people

Genesis – the creation of man and his fall, the redemption of man through a covenant with God and the early history of Hebrews

Exodus – the deliverance and history of Israel, God's chosen people

Leviticus – a book of divine Old Testament laws

Numbers – more history, shows how unbelievers bars entrance for Israel into the promised land

Deuteronomy – a proclamation of laws given by Moses with a call to obedience

Joshua – the conquest and division of the promise land

Judges – history of Israel, shows the Israelites forsaking and returning to the Lord

Ruth – the history of Ruth and how she became an ancestor of Christ

1Samuel – the story about how Israel asked for a king

2Samuel – the reign of King David

1Kings – the reign of King Solomon and the division of Israel into two nations

2Kings – history of the two Israelite kingdoms

1Chronicles – supplement of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings

2Chronicles – supplement of Kings, shows more of the spiritual element of the history

Ezra – the return of the Jews from captivity and the rebuilding of the temple

Nehemiah – the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem

Esther – the deliverance of the Jews by Queen Esther

Poetical – books that are poetical by nature and have deep expressions

Job – the story Job's suffering

Psalms – a book of songs and poems, the main theme is prayer and praise

Proverbs – a book of wisdom

Ecclesiastes – the reflections of a philosopher at the end of his life

Song of Solomon – a book written as an allegory of love between God and His people

Prophetic – books containing prophecies of many different avenues

Isaiah - prophesy concerning the captivity of the Jews and the coming Messiah

Jeremiah - a book about the backsliding, bondage, and restoration of the Jews

Lamentations - sequel to Jeremiah, portrays the capture of Israel

Ezekiel - a book about the condition of Judah and the redemption to come

Daniel - a book about the sovereignty of God and future events

Hosea - a book the parallels leaving God with adultery

Joel - a book about repentance and its blessings

Amos - a book about the judgments of Israel

Obadiah - centers around an ancient feud between Edom and Israel

Jonah - story of a prophet called to preach in Nineveh

Micah – a book about the judgments and restoration to come

Nahum – a book about the destruction of Nineveh

Habakkuk – a book about the mystery of God's providence and mercy

Zephaniah – a book about the searching judgments of God

Haggai – rebuke for neglecting to rebuild the temple with promises to those who are doing the work

Zechariah – a book about the sinful condition of Israel, but also focuses on the future hope of the Messiah

Malachi – a book showing changes needed to prepare for the Messiah

New Testament – there are 27 books in the New Testament, centers on the life of Jesus, and the early church

Gospels – books written about Jesus, serves as biography and history

Matthew – a book written to convince the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah they've been waiting for

Mark – a book about Jesus' activities and power

Luke – a book written to introduce non-religious people to Jesus

John – a book written to emphasize that Jesus is God and to inspire faith

Acts – a description of the early church and how the story of Jesus spread throughout the Roman world

Epistles – letters to the first Christian churches and/or Christians

Romans – a letter written to explain systematically and logically, God's plan to save us

1Corinthians – a letter of advise to a church with problems

2Corinthians – Paul's defense of his ministry in response to accusations from members of the church

Galatians – a reminder that only God's grace, not good works or lawful living, can save us from sin

Ephesians – a letter describing the bonds that unite all believers as one family

Philippians – a letter written to explain that life in Christ is a life of true joy

Colossians – a letter written to challenge false teachings and to call for recommitment to faith in Christ

1Thessalonians – encouragement for new Christians with a focus on the Second Coming of Christ

2Thessalonians – further encouragement for new Christians with a focus on the Second Coming of Christ

1Timothy – a letter of advise and encouragement for those in positions of authority in the church

2Timothy – a challenge to Christian leaders to continue their ministries

Titus – instructions for living a godly life

Philemon – a letter encouraging Christians to forgive each other and restore unity among themselves

Hebrews – a letter pleading for a renewed focus on Christ and promising a better life as a result

James – a letter written to encourage persecuted Christians and to correct false ideas

1Peter – a letter written to encouragement, describing the hope Christians Christ's return

2Peter – a letter warning Christians of False ideas

1John – a letter to inspire Christians to love each other and live in harmony

2John – an urging to stand up to false teachers

3John – a letter written to request help for Christians who teach the truth

Jude – a warning against false teachers

Revelation – a vision of the future, prophecy of events to come when Christ will win over evil forever

Online Resources :: answers to tough questions

In addition, a few other Web sites are listed below that you might want to consult. While Red Rocks Church recommends these for their overall value and quality of scholarship, we do not necessarily endorse specific content or conclusions.

www.carm.org :: The Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry

www.equip.org :: The Christian Research Institute

www.apologeticspress.org :: Apologetics Press

www.impactapologetics.com :: Impact Apologetics

www.leaderu.com :: Leadership University

www.origins.org :: Resources for Intelligent Design

www.probe.org :: Probe Ministries

www.reasons.org :: Reasons to Believe

www.str.org :: Stand to Reason