

# Salvation, Sin & Forgiveness

## Welcome to God's Family!

*Now that you believe in Jesus Christ, you are a "child of God" and you belong to a new family. The goal of this family is to serve God and to love people. Some people think that Christianity is a set of rules. It is really a relationship between a loving God and his beloved children*

(Romans 5:6-11).

*Here are some of the most common questions that Christians have...*

## How Can I Be Sure that I'm Saved?

The Bible tells us to:

- A** Admit we have sinned  
(Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 John 1:10)
- B** Believe in Jesus (John 1:12)
- C** Confess that Jesus is Lord  
(Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8, 9)

Sometimes you may feel close to God, other times you may feel distant from him. Some people feel great joy and freedom from their problems when they first believe in Jesus. After a while, this joy may fade. This is normal.

### Don't depend on your feelings.

The Bible says, "...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

**Look for evidence of change.** God now calls you his child, and has sent his Spirit to work inside you (John 1:12; 14:25, 26). As a follower of Jesus, you should see

*progress—not perfection—in your desire to obey and please Him (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 7:14-25). For example, before you became a Christian you lost your temper or lied or hated people and it did not bother you. Now you have a deep desire to change and you regret your failures.*

**Hang in there!** When you're discouraged by doubts and failures, remember that growth is a process. God has plans for you, and won't give up on you—ask for God's help. God promises to help you improve (Philippians 1:6).

## Can God Forgive Me?

**Yes!** God can forgive any sin, no matter how terrible—cheating, murder, lying, infidelity, gossip, theft, selfishness. All people fail and disobey God. No one measures up. In fact the Bible says that no one can please God by good deeds. Good deeds aren't good enough.



## God promises that he will forgive you.

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).*

Jesus once told a story to his disciples, warning them that "good people" who think they are good enough for God are in more spiritual danger than humble people who recognize that they are unworthy and ask for forgiveness (Luke 18:9-14).

### Confess your sins and forgive others.

Though God has forgiven you, you'll still have struggles. Some consequences and scars from your past may remain. If you've wronged others, ask for their forgiveness and try to make amends (with counsel from mature believers). When others wrong you, God asks that you forgive them—not because they deserve it, but out of gratitude for the great gift you received from God (Colossians 3:13).

## What If I Sin?

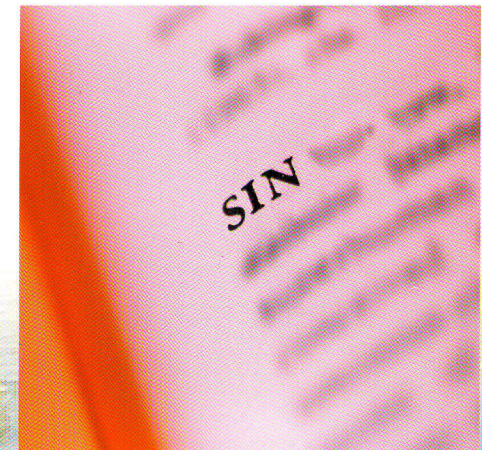
### Don't be surprised by your struggles.

**Everyone has them.** The Bible says ... *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus* (Romans 3:23, 24).

Every follower of Jesus has certain vulnerabilities, whether it is losing your temper, materialism, envy, gossip, or pornography. People may persuade you to disobey God, or you may find yourself in tempting situations. The Bible says that before you accept Jesus, it is very difficult

for you to resist temptation (Colossians 1:13). Even after deciding to follow Jesus, people still struggle with temptation and sometimes give into temptation. The good news is, once you've decided to follow Jesus, you will possess the desire to please God daily, and God will continue to help you resist temptation (Romans 7:21-25).

**All people sin.** When you do sin, it's not the end of your relationship with God. Confess your wrongs to God, and he will forgive you. Find Christian friends and support one another.



**No matter what happens, God promises you a way to escape any spiritual danger.**

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it* (1 Corinthians 10:13).



# Prayer, Bible Study & Church

## How Do I Pray?

**God wants to have a relationship with you!**

Prayer is simply “staying connected” with your heavenly Father by talking to him. It doesn’t matter whether you’re happy, puzzled, hurt, or in trouble; you can talk about anything with God. Trust that God wants the best for you. When you ask for things, God may say “yes,” “no,” or “not yet” (Romans 8:26-28).

**God cares about you and will listen to you when you talk to him.** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6, 7).

**Where to pray.** Jesus said you should find a secluded quiet place, and pray to God (Matthew 6:6). You can pray in your bedroom, car, or on a walk...anywhere. Try to set aside a special time each day to talk to God. Many people find that early morning is the best time to pray because there are fewer distractions. Start by praying for five to ten minutes and then increase the time you spend with God as your prayer life becomes more disciplined.

**The Lord’s Prayer.** Jesus taught his disciples how to pray using the Lord’s Prayer:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And*

*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

**The Lord’s Prayer has four parts to help us remember:**

- **PRAISE** Recognize that God is great and in charge. Remember, God loves you and knows what’s best for you.
- **PROVIDE** Ask God to provide for you, your family, and friends. Ask for healing, courage, and wisdom for the problems you might have.
- **PARDON** Confess your sins and ask others for forgiveness. Remember to forgive people who have wronged you. Let God know that you are sorry for disobeying him and wronging other people. Ask for forgiveness; God promises to forgive you.
- **PROTECTION** We are constantly faced with temptation. Ask for God’s protection and the strength to do what is right (Matthew 6:9-13).

## How Do I Read the Bible?

**Open It!** In order to follow Jesus you need to know what he said and did.

**Begin by reading the Gospels (stories of the life of Jesus):**

- Matthew • Luke
- Mark • John

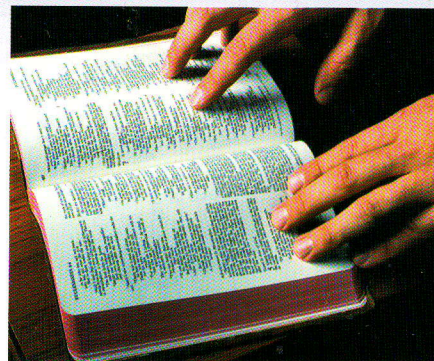
**Apply It!**

**As you read, look for—**

- An example to admire or avoid
- A command to obey
- A sin to confess
- A promise to embrace

With a mature believer, discuss the parts you don’t understand. Read and pray (Acts 17:11).

**Engage It!** You may find it helpful to use a study Bible and take notes about what you read.



It is important to read the Bible every day, because it has many passages that will give you encouragement. Memorizing these verses will be a big help to your life (Psalm 1:2; 119:15, 16).

**It may be helpful to read:**

- Genesis • Psalms
- Proverbs • Romans

**Why is the Bible Important?**

The Bible is the Word of God. It provides us with the wisdom needed in order to share with others the “good news” about Jesus. The Bible is useful for teaching others, recognizing incorrect teachings, and learning how to live as followers of Jesus day by day (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

## Do I Need to Go to Church?

**A New Family.** The church is made up of believers who become your family.

The people at church care about you, support you, teach you, and encourage you.

**The Lord wants believers to meet**

**together.** *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching* (Heb. 10:24, 25).

**A Special Niche.** The Bible describes the church as a building where you fit like a custom-cut stone (1 Peter 2:4, 5). Every player on a sports team is necessary and important to the team as a whole. In the same way, you are important to the church, and other believers need you. Your unique strengths and gifts will help others. You may not like or agree with every other believer, but no Christian is perfect and neither are you.

**Be forgiving and live at peace with other followers of Jesus.**

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace* (Eph. 4:2, 3).

**A Larger Purpose.** When Jesus went to heaven, he told his followers to love each other. In fact, he said that other people would know you were a follower of Jesus if you loved other Christians.

This is not always easy. Some people have personalities that are hard to love. Perhaps they are judgmental or grumpy. Jesus calls us to treat them kindly and gently and care for them.



# Fears, Doubts & Trust

## What About Fears and Doubts?

### *The Fear Factor.*

Do you ever worry about the future? How will I pay my bills? Will I ever get married? Will my children be safe? Will disaster strike? Life is better when we have someone strong and loving to lean on.

### **The Bible says that God will never abandon you.**

*"...the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Deuteronomy 31:6).

**20 Questions.** Real Christians *can* have doubts. At times, they may question whether God actually exists or doubt some of the claims of the Christian faith.

The Bible is full of questioners! Jesus' disciple Thomas was not present when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples after he rose from the dead. Thomas said that he would not believe unless he could see and touch the holes in Jesus' hands and put his hand in Jesus' side. Thomas might have had doubts about Jesus, but he kept his mind and heart open to the truth. When Jesus did appear to Thomas, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." It was his search for the Truth that led Thomas into a faith that he had never had before (John 20:19-28).

Having doubts and questions may spur you to seek out answers, which can only bring you closer to God. In addition, believing something without checking the Bible may put you in spiritual danger. Doubts and

questions help protect believers from being misled or becoming stagnant and inactive in their walk with Jesus.

## Can God Be Trusted?

**Why do bad things happen?** A broken heart, an illness, a death in the family, a lost job.... Problems do come to followers of Jesus. Some hurts result from our own selfishness while others may result from the behavior of others. Bad things happen simply because we do not live in a perfect world and because God wanted to give us free will—the freedom to choose right and wrong (Rom. 8:18-23).



**Is God really in control?** Yes! God is with you, and he protects you more than you realize. When God does allow difficulties, it may be his way of disciplining you or strengthening you.

**The Bible says that trials and sufferings help mold God's children into who God wants them to be.** *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything* (James 1:2-4).

You may not recognize the purpose for problems in your life when they are

occurring, but many times these trials could be part of a larger, unseen plan (John 9:1-3).

**God has a good plan for you.** *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jeremiah 29:11).

Just before Jesus died on the cross, he earnestly asked God if it was possible to avoid it. However, Jesus ended his prayer by saying, "May Your will be done." Jesus also encouraged his followers to trust that God would take care of them (Matt. 6:25-34).

**Why is the world such a mess?** If God condemns poverty and injustice, why does it go on? Evil has polluted everything and everyone God created (Jeremiah 17:9). Some skeptics say that either God is not loving or He is not powerful enough to stop evil. The truth is that God puts up with evil, but only for a while, because he is waiting with patience and love for people to return to him. A day of final judgment *will* come, when God will punish evil (2 Peter 3:1-10). God will make everything right and fair in the end.

## What's My Purpose in Life?

**The Big Picture.** You were created to serve God and love the people around you. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:37-39).

Ultimately, the purpose in life for believers is to worship God in everything we do. In addition, we are to care about other people and tell them about Jesus. God cares about everyone, and longs for each person to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3, 4).

**How Do You Fit In?** You have a unique role in God's kingdom. The Bible says that God is the potter and you are the clay—the work of his hands (Isaiah 64:8). God knew you before you were born, and created you to have special qualities and talents for serving him. He shaped your background and circumstances, both good and bad (Psalm 139; Ephesians 2:10). Often, God uses the painful situations of the past to help others. For example, a widow may someday help a friend or lead a ministry that helps others go through grief.



**Day by Day.** How will you know what God wants you to do at each moment? Start by reading the Bible and obeying its teachings. Do your normal everyday responsibilities with a cheerful attitude and look for ways to serve others (Psalm 100:2). Pray for guidance and understanding. Your goal is to hear God say, "Good job" (Matthew 25:21).



# Key Verses to Memorize

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* —Romans 10:9

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* —1 John 1:9

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* —Romans 3:23, 24

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 4:6, 7

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* —Jeremiah 29:11

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

—James 1:2-4

**The Great Commandment:** *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* —Matthew 22:37-39

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.* —1 Peter 4:10

*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* —John 3:16

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* —Ephesians 2:8-10

ISBN-10: 1-596360-35-6

ISBN-13: 978-159636-035-8

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**ROSE**  
PUBLISHING

© 2005 RW Research, Inc.  
Rose Publishing, Inc.  
4733 Torrance Blvd., #259  
Torrance, California 90503 U.S.A.  
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Email: [info@rose-publishing.com](mailto:info@rose-publishing.com)  
[www.rose-publishing.com](http://www.rose-publishing.com)

Primary author: Sue Gilliland

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# Spiritual Gifts, Giving & Sharing

## What Are Spiritual Gifts and Talents?

You already had God-given talents before you decided to follow Jesus. Now you can use them for His glory—whether playing the guitar during worship, serving food in a homeless shelter, fixing the pastor's computer, leading a Bible study, or rocking babies in the church nursery.

**Now, as a believer, you receive special gifts from God's Spirit to help His kingdom.** *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms* (1 Peter 4:10).

You may have a gift for preaching, teaching, or showing mercy. You may be good at encouraging others or noticing their needs. People may ask you for wise advice. The Bible lists many gifts (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). To find your gifts, ask others what they think your gifts might be. Pray and try different ways of serving God. Though some gifts may seem better than others, the Bible is clear that every gift is important and necessary (Romans 12:3-8). No one should feel too important or unimportant; all gifts are needed for God's people to function as a team (1 Corinthians 12:4-31).

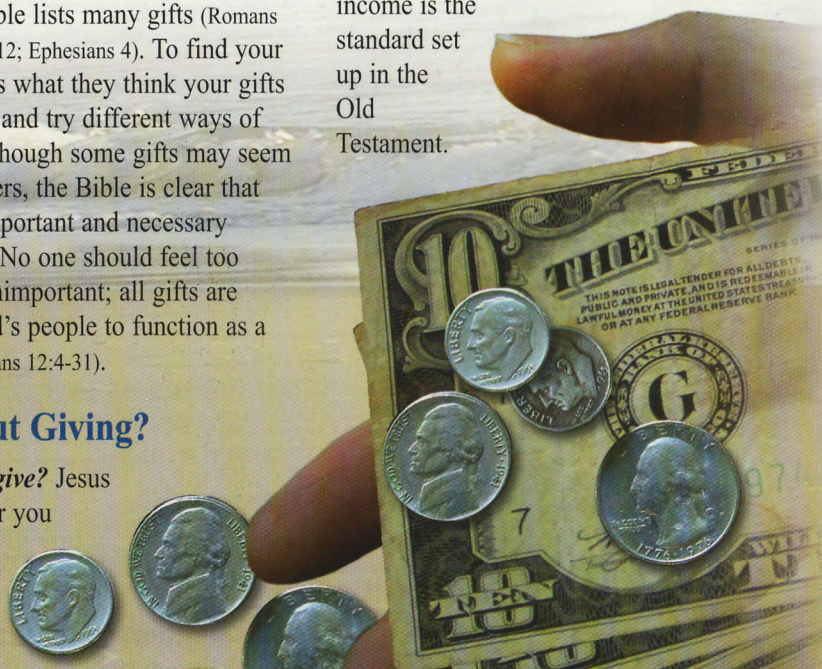
## What about Giving?

**Why should I give?** Jesus gave his life for you (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

Now you *and* all you own belong to him (Psalm 24:1). God wants our love and gratitude. We demonstrate our devotion to God by giving. Giving to God demonstrates that we are following Jesus and making him our "Number One" priority (Matthew 6:24).

**Where should I give?** You can advance God's cause in the world in many ways. You might give cash, a car, a computer, even a cow! Pastors, Christian workers, and missionaries need salaries. Church and outreach programs need money for buildings, books, utility bills, and more. And poor people, in your church or across the world, need help just to survive.

**How do I give?** Before you donate, ask if the money will be used wisely. Support the church you attend, and perhaps other causes as God stirs your heart. Contribute regularly and generously. A tenth of your income is the standard set up in the Old Testament.



When giving is tough, pray for God's help. God does promise to reward you in his own way whenever you give humbly and generously (Malachi 3:8-10, Matthew 6:1-4).

**When you give with a cheerful attitude, God will give you all that you need.**

*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work* (2 Corinthians 9:7, 8).

## How Do I Tell Others?

**Start with your lifestyle.** Actions speak louder than words! Jesus said that others will know Christians by their love for other people (John 13:35). Put other people's needs ahead of your own (Luke 10:27). With God's help, you can brighten your world with love and good deeds (Matthew 5:13-16).

**Be prepared to talk about Jesus.**

You never know when someone may ask (1 Peter 3:15).



**God cares about people so much that he sent Jesus to save them and give them eternal life in heaven.** Jesus said that, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

It would be helpful to mention a few Bible verses, such as:

- Romans 3:23: *...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*
- Romans 5:8, 9: *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- Romans 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Share what God has done in your life. God promises to help you (1 Corinthians 2:11-13).

**Look for opportunities.** People can't learn about Jesus unless someone tells them (Romans 10:13-15). Pray for chances to share. Bring God into conversations naturally, talking about how you deal with problems or worries. Notice when others express spiritual hunger, and let them know what you have experienced. Treat them with gentleness and love, even if they are not open to the message (Colossians 4:6).

**Leave matters in God's hands.** You can't force someone to follow Jesus. You are responsible to share with and pray for others who don't know Jesus. God's Spirit can turn the most unlikely people to His Truth (Romans 10:1).



# Reliability of the Christian Faith

## Is the Bible Reliable?

**More than myths.** More than 100 archaeological finds have confirmed the accuracy of the Bible. For example, scholars dismissed the biblical description of the Hittite nation as fiction until they found evidence (Joshua 1:1-4). The Bible's descriptions of cities, rulers, and battles match other historical records.

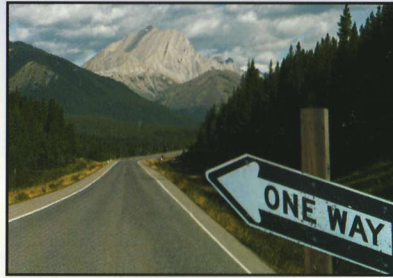
**The Bible is inspired by God and is useful for teaching and equipping followers of Jesus to do God's work.**

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

**Accurately copied.** Before the printing press, special scribes copied these texts by hand with an intricate checking system. The text of the Bible is better

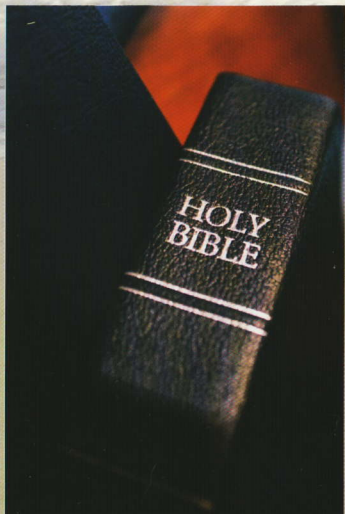
preserved than the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm their accuracy.

## Is Following Jesus the Only Way to be Saved?



**One way to God.** Followers of Jesus claim to be a part of the one true religion and recognize the claims of Jesus as being true. Many people of other religions are good and moral people, but Jesus' own statements say that believing in him is the one and only way to be saved. In addition, the Bible is clear that being a moral person or doing good deeds is not enough to be saved.

- **Jesus said he was the only way to God.** Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6).
- **Jesus said that he provides people with eternal life.** Jesus said, *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand"* (John 10:28).
- **Jesus claimed to be God.** Jesus said, *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30).



- **Being a good, sincere person is not enough.** The Bible says, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

## Is There Evidence for the Resurrection?



**Jesus was a real person.** At least 39 ancient Jewish and Gentile sources *apart from the Bible* note his teachings, miracles, life, and death.

### **Many saw him dead, then alive.**

Some say Jesus merely fainted on the cross. Others say the people who saw him alive later were "hallucinating." But Jesus' enemies and the Roman soldiers who executed him were satisfied that he was dead. Then after three days, 500 people, as individuals and in groups, morning and evening, indoors and outdoors, over a period of 40 days, saw and touched him as he walked, ate, and preached (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

**His followers changed radically.** Jesus' disciples turned from "common people" into bold preachers, bravely facing persecution. Most died as martyrs for their faith (Acts 4:1-22; 12:1-3). People would not die for a religious belief if they knew that belief was a lie.

**Why does it matter?** Jesus' resurrection proved he was divine and that everything he taught and claimed is true.

**The resurrection of Jesus showed the penalty for sin was paid. It displayed God's power over death, and the new life he offers.**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* (1 Peter 1:3).

Jesus is our hope, who lives forever to present us as clean and pure before God (Heb. 7:12-25).

## The Journey

*When you chose to follow Jesus, you embarked upon a journey—a journey that has high mountain peaks and occasional low valleys. You are on a journey of which the final destination is eternal life with God in heaven. The good news is that you are not left alone as you travel. You are following Jesus and He promises not to leave you behind. You also have several travelers alongside of you to help you along, encourage you, and help carry your load.*