

Welcome To The Family

We want to take this opportunity to welcome you as the newest member of the family of God. And you don't see it now but all the angels in heaven are rejoicing with us over you, for God has birthed a new child! What you shall become remains a mystery to us. But we wait with expectation as God unfolds the promises hidden within you that will bring praise and glory to His name.

You may be wondering what just happened to you, how you fit in to God's family and what the future holds for you. So we'll try to explain a few of these things so that you can comfortably settle in. You are not expected to "know" everything we are telling you right now ... that will come as you grow.

What Just Happened To Me?

Just as you were born as a baby into your natural family, you have now been born as a baby into the family of God.¹ The Bible calls this being "**born again**" and is a direct reference to what Jesus told Nicodemus, one of the religious leaders of His day. *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."*(John 3:3-6)

Your new birth occurred when the Holy Spirit convinced your heart that the words you were hearing about the Lord Jesus Christ were true. This is called believing the **gospel**. The gospel simply means the "good news" about Jesus, the Son of God. Shortly after Jesus' death, resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven the Apostle Peter proclaimed the **gospel** for the first time. This is what he said.

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. For David says of Him, 'I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE; BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.' Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with

¹ This family of God is referred to as the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, throughout the Bible.

*us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.' Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both **Lord** and **Christ**—this **Jesus** whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "**Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.**" (Acts 2:22-39)*

When Peter proclaimed the gospel he said that each of those who had believed should be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ and on that day three thousand souls were baptized. Jesus said, "*He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.*" Baptism² occurs when a person, who has been "born again", is immersed in water. You might liken this act to that of a baby being washed after he has been born alive from its mother's womb. The Bible explains it this way, "*Or do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized** into Christ Jesus have been **baptized** into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through **baptism** into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*" (Romans 6:3-4)

As a member of the family of God you may not "feel" any different than before but the Scriptures³ assure us otherwise. *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)* You have inherited eternal life. *And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1 John 5:11)* The Holy Spirit lives inside you now and He will lead and guide you all the days of your life. *But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13)* And you have been given an eternal inheritance. *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, (Ephesians 1:13-14)*

² Baptism is the first of two ordinances that the Lord Jesus Christ required the church to perform. At your baptism you will probably be asked to make a public profession of your faith. Usually, just before you are immersed in the water you might be asked, "Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" To which you would respond, "I do."

³ The Scriptures are the written Word of God, the Bible.

Understanding Your New Family

When you were born into God's family you also got a lot of brothers and sisters. That's us! We are called **Christians** because we "follow" Jesus Christ. Often we are referred to as the **Church**, which simply means, "Called out ones". Sometimes when people use the word "church" they are referring to the building we meet in or the services we conduct in the building.

Each of us as God's children has the same Father, Lord and Teacher. Jesus told us, "*But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher [The Holy Spirit], and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father [The Creator], He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader [Lord], that is, Christ [Jesus]. But the greatest among you shall be your servant.*" (Matthew 23:8-11)

No one in God's family is better than you; but most have been in the family longer than you have. And with maturity comes greater wisdom and responsibility. Within the Church, some are given positions of responsibility to oversee various tasks. God does not want them to "lord it over" you or anyone else in the Church but to serve one another with love and humility. As your older brothers and sisters it is our responsibility to come alongside you, care for you and help you grow. And in time these things will be required of you as well.

Each of us as Christians have been created for five purposes:

1. We were planned for God's pleasure. (We call this Worship)
2. We were formed for God's family. (We call this Fellowship)
3. We were created to become like Christ. (We call this Discipleship)
4. We were shaped for serving God. (We call this Ministry)
5. We were made for a mission. (We call this Evangelism)

We seek to adhere to the Great Commandment, which is to:

- Love God (by obeying His commandments)
- Love others (by treating them the same way we want to be treated)

We seek to accomplish the Great Commission, which is to make disciples by:

- Being clothed with power from on high.
- Going into our world.
- Proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Baptizing those who have believed.
- Teaching those who have believed, everything that Jesus instructed them to do.

has been assigned to you in this initial phase⁴ of your Christian life. Their responsibilities include helping you get acclimated to life in God's family, meeting others, answering your questions, getting to know you and assisting you as needs arise.

⁴ This initial phase usually takes about three months.

As You Begin To Grow

You were “born again” into a supernatural life. It is not like the life you have lived up to this point and requires a different kind of thinking. God wants you to become conformed to the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures say, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*” (Romans 12:2)

We call the process of transformation ... the spiritual maturity process. Others refer to it as discipleship. The goal of this process is to assist the Holy Spirit in making you an effective disciple of Jesus Christ, displaying His love and power to everyone around you. *For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:10)

The spiritual maturity process follows a pattern similar to the one you experienced as a child growing up. It can occur much more quickly than the natural but depends largely on your cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Following are some examples of things you will be taught shortly after your training⁵ begins ... that compare with things that you were taught as a child:

Natural Maturity

Learning to identify your parent’s voice.

Command/response

Visual identification of things with words.

Feeding.

Mobility.

Communication.

Understanding.

Social contact.

Developing large motor skills.

Spiritual Maturity

Learning to identify your heavenly Father’s voice.

Following God’s directions

Association of Scripture to the surrounding world.

Putting God’s word in you.

Walking by the Spirit.

Talking with God (Prayer).

Seeing like God.

Interaction with siblings in church.

Using your talents in church ministry with little responsibility.

⁵ Training begins at about three months and is conducted in a small group atmosphere. We recognize that people live busy lives so we will work with you in finding a time that is convenient for your training.

One of the problems that new family members usually encounter early on in their “new” life is that sometimes they behave inappropriately. The Bible calls this **sin** and it occurs when your words or actions are not motivated by love.

The word **sin** simply means, “missing the mark”. It can be compared to an archer trying to hit the target with an arrow. When the archer is a beginner he misses the target many times but with practice can hit it every time.

When you **sin** or “miss the mark” your heavenly father will discipline you. The Scriptures say it this way, “*FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.*” *It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?* (Hebrews 12:6-7) God loves you more than you can imagine so His correction is not designed to harm you but is commensurate with helping you hit the mark next time.

When you “miss the mark” you should immediately confess the **sin** to Jesus because the Scripture gives you a great promise and hope when you do. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1John 1:9) If you **sin** against another person you should also confess your **sin** to him because it is written, “*Confess your sins to one another.*” And if someone **sins** against you, forgive them, since Jesus forgives you.

There are many things for you to learn and do in the days ahead but this is probably enough for now. Remember, that we love you because you are our new baby and we are pleased that our heavenly Father sent you to us. May His righteousness, peace and joy abide in you forever! Welcome to the family.