

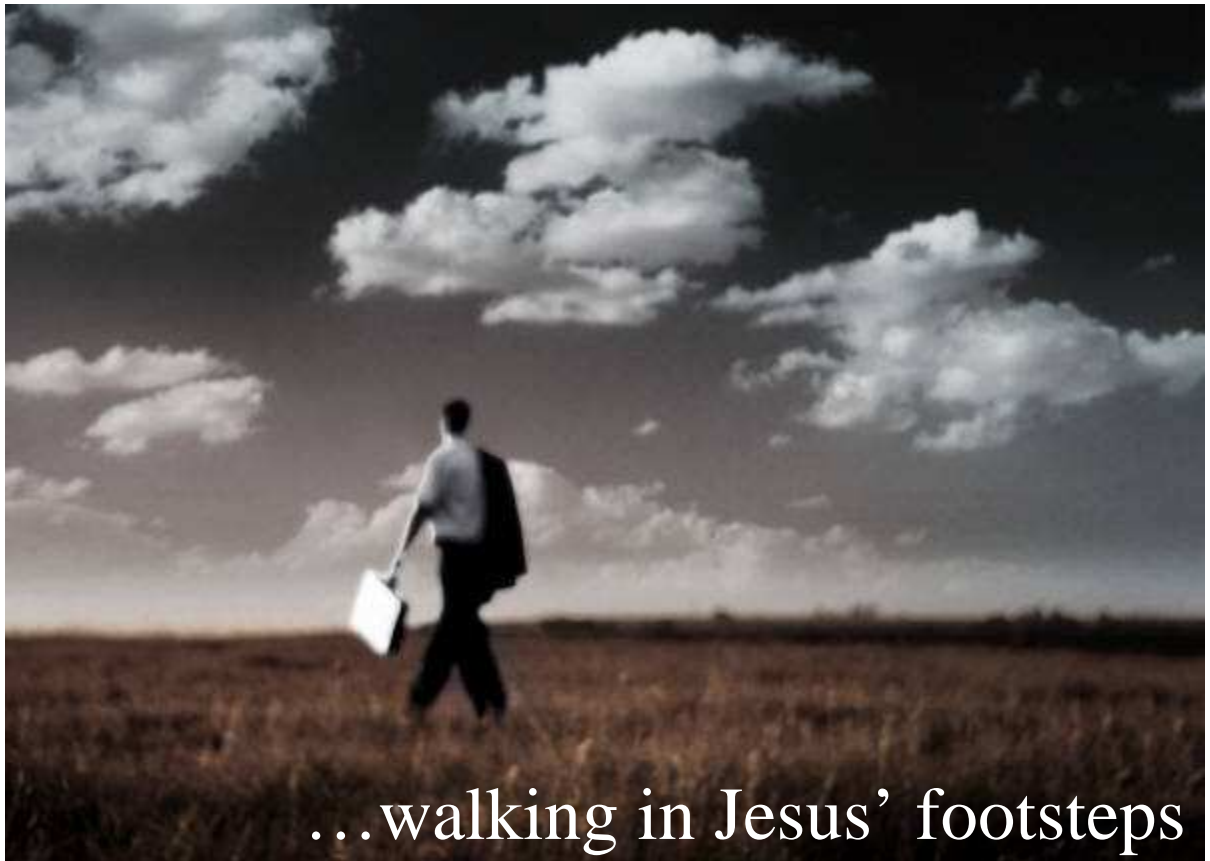


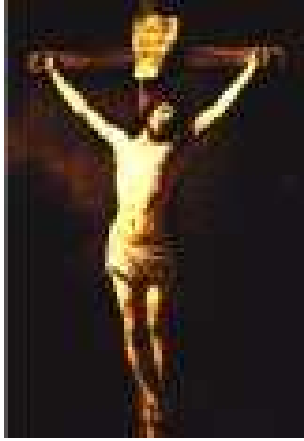
Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Seven

Our sixth stage of discovery with Theo looked at how we should respond if we want to accept God's offer of forgiveness and new life in His Son. In this seventh (and last) stage of discovery, Theo looks briefly at the Christian's new life in Christ.

The quest continues . . .

The Journey Home





The bottom line: Gospel shaped living

Having begun our journey home, our chief concern in life is now the question:

“What would Jesus do if He were living my life?”

... because He is living my life through me!

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer me in charge, but Jesus lives in and through me. So I live this life in this earthly body by trusting and obeying the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me ...
(Galatians 2:20)

*We have a leader to follow,
a mentor to imitate,
a big brother in whose footsteps we are to walk ...*
(Romans 8:29; 1 John 2:1-6)



We are rescued from sin to become holy – a temple of God's Holy Spirit!

Please take the time to read Matthew 3:13-4:11

It is no coincidence that the Christian's new life with God begins in the same way that Jesus' own ministry began: water baptism and anointing with the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove to alight upon Jesus at His water baptism, the Father affirmed that Jesus was truly His beloved Son (Matthew 3:16-17)



Trusting God's promise and His faithfulness, we know that we received the Holy Spirit from God at the time of our own water baptism too (Acts 2:38; 5:32). Thus we were sealed and anointed with the Holy Spirit, confirmed as God's special possession (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14) and His beloved "re-born", "adopted" child (John 3:5-8; Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:6)

Christians are strengthened and led by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-17; Ephesians 3:16) who dwells in us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) to help us live lives set apart (i.e. holy) to God (this is called **sanctification** and it is a growing process – just as a babe matures into an adult, our sanctification and becoming holy is a life-long process). The primary means the Holy Spirit uses to lead, instruct and convict us is God's word, the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 10:15-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

And it is important to remember the Holy Spirit is a 'helper', not a 'maker'. Our role is to submit to Him and cooperate with Him, allowing God to work in our lives and transform our minds and hearts (Galatians 5:13-26; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-16). Not to submit and cooperate is to grieve the Holy Spirit and stifle His influence in our lives (Galatians 6:7-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:19)

Jesus and temptation

Jesus' trial in the wilderness includes His confrontation with Satan – someone that Theo has alluded to, but not explained in any detail.

Satan is a powerful being – probably an angel. Though the Bible only gives hints about Satan's identity, it seems likely he is an arch angel who led a rebellion against God (cf. 1 Timothy 3:6; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Satan is actively opposed to God and all of God's purposes. Satan orchestrated the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God (Genesis 3:1ff.), and he seeks to keep us all in a state of rebellion against God.

Satan is the enemy of God and all humankind. He delights in our dishonouring of God, and because humans are special to God, Satan seeks our destruction. Christians should not treat lightly the threat Satan poses (1 Peter 5:8-9). Though we cannot 'see' it on the six-o'clock television news, there is a spiritual battle raging. This makes Jesus' response to Satan's temptations all the more important if we too are going to resist Satan.

It is no coincidence that the Christian's life includes trials and temptation from the very beginning, just like Jesus' own experience.

The apostle John said:

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh (pleasures) the lust of the eyes (possessions) and the pride of life (prestige or power) – is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:15-16)

The 'world' here represents the sphere of Satan's influence and purposes as opposed to God's influence and purposes. These elements (the three P's) are evident in the original temptation (Genesis 3:1-6) as well as Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

These seem to be Satan's most effective modes of attack as he seeks to undermine or deny the truth and promises of God and His word, trying to draw us away from God (James 1:13-21; 1 Peter 5:6-11) by asserting our independence of God – determining right and wrong for ourselves to usurp God's place (Genesis 3:5)

“If you are the Son of God ...”

Satan's first approach to Jesus sought to cast doubt in His mind about His relationship with God. “If you are the Son of God . . .” It is not uncommon as a new Christian to have doubts about our relationship with God. Satan will always try to convince us that God is against us rather than for us. He will point to our negative feelings, our difficult times and our failures to undermine our faith in God and His love for us (just like he got Eve's attention off the many blessings of God and on to the one restriction God had placed on her and Adam, Genesis 3:1)

Those born of water and the Spirit have a **concrete experience** (not just ‘feelings’) to look back to (*i.e. their baptism*). If a repentant believer has been baptised into Christ, they have God's assurance that they are His beloved child – they have God's promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and God is faithful in keeping His promises!

Thank God that our relationship with Him is dependent on His grace and His faithfulness, not our feelings or our circumstances or our performance (Romans 8:28-39). Thank God that even when we do fail (and we all do!) we still have His forgiveness and acceptance as we confess our need for Him and continue to try and walk in His light (1 John 1:5-2:6). Thank God that He is a loving Father who cares enough to allow us to be disciplined and tested in life for our own spiritual welfare and growth (Hebrews 12:5-13)

“Turn these stones into bread ...”

Jesus had been exposed to hardship and danger in the wilderness for forty days. Jesus was hungry and the idea of turning stones into bread must have been very appealing after fasting for so long.

But Jesus knew the wilderness trial was God's way of testing Him and strengthening His faith for what lay ahead (that the similarity between Jesus' wilderness trial and that of Israel following their baptism in the Red Sea, 1 Corinthians 10:1ff., did not escape Jesus is evidenced by the context of the Scriptures He cited in rejecting Satan's temptations)

Satan was effectively proposing that Jesus take matters into His own hands rather than trusting and depending upon God. Jesus would have none of it. He responded: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Deuteronomy 8:1-5). There was more at stake here than His physical comfort – Jesus would discipline Himself to depend upon God and trust in His Father rather than Himself, even in the most trying of circumstances.

“Throw yourself down ...”

Satan tries to provoke Jesus to put God to the test by appealing to Jesus' pride. Satan even quotes Scripture (albeit out of context) to seduce Jesus: “Show everyone how much God cares for you by *forcing* Him to protect you from harm – that will get the people's attention and prove you are God's special One!” Jesus' recourse is again to God's word (in proper context), “It is wrong to tempt God” (Deuteronomy 6:16, cf. Exodus 17:2-7)

Jesus' relationship with God was not conditioned upon God's measuring up to certain expectations or dealing out special favours: God is to be trusted, honoured and served, not manipulated or exploited for our own purposes!

“Fall down and worship me ...”

Jesus had come to establish God's kingdom on earth. Satan set it all out before Jesus and said, “take it!” God's way to establish His kingdom was long and hard and it included Jesus' suffering and death. Satan's way appeared easy and painless. All Jesus needed to do was worship Satan and turn His back on God (Deuteronomy 6:10-15; 10:12-22)

Sometimes a Christian will find God's way hard and be tempted to turn her or his back on God too. When those times come, our answer needs to be the same as Jesus' response: “Away with you, Satan! . . . I will worship the Lord my God, and Him only shall I serve”.

We were made for relationship with God – Abba Father!

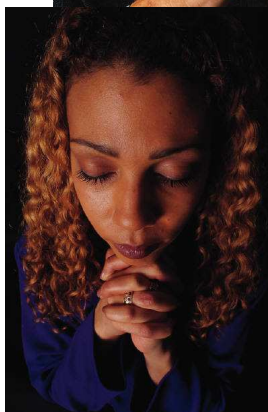
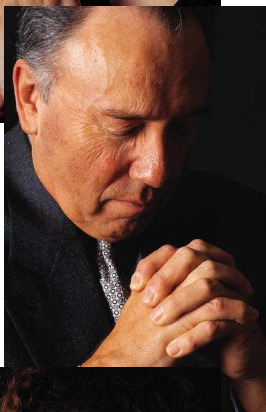
Jesus' life was dominated by His close relationship with His Father. This closeness was most apparent in His prayers. Jesus spoke to God regularly, sometimes all night long. Sometimes His prayers were fervent and very focused. Sometimes His prayers seem like casual conversations with God. Sometimes He prayed alone. At other times He shared prayers with His disciples. Regardless of His circumstances, prayer was a constant in Jesus' life. He even made a special point of teaching His disciples how to pray (Matthew 6:5-15)

While God speaks to us primarily through His word, we speak to God through prayer. If a relationship is to be vital and healthy, it must involve

both talking and listening. God delights in our communication with Him. He wants us to listen to Him through understanding and obeying His word, and He wants to listen to us as a Father who yearns to enjoy and share in a rich relationship with His children. It is important that we remember God's interest and involvement in our every day activities and speak with Him often. Dallas Willard put it nicely when he said that prayer is like a friend walking and talking with a friend. It is the sharing of our life together with God, and out of it we pray.

If it is in accordance with God's will, our prayers can change things (James 5:13-18; 1 John 5:14-15). With God, all things are possible (Matthew 17:14-21). We must trust in God's promises and power sufficiently to ask Him, not limiting our requests in proportion to our own limitations or doubts (Ephesians 3:20-21; James 1:5-8)

Sometimes God's answer may be no. God's answer may not be when or what we expected. We must be persistent (Luke 11:1-13), knowing that God hears us. And yes, God knows what we need and want before we ask Him – but God wants us to enter into a deep relationship with Him and developing an intimate relationship requires much experience shared together where trust and open communication prevail.



Based upon Jesus' model prayer, this acronym (ACTS) may be helpful as you seek to develop your own prayers.

In time, prayer will occur naturally as your relationship with God grows, but at first it may seem a little awkward.

Adoration

Express your adoration and reverence to our Creator God: Father, Saviour, Helper

Confession

Lay bare your faults and failures to God and ask for healing and forgiveness

Thanksgiving

Thank God for His provision and goodness

Supplication

Bring your concerns and requests before God

We were made for relationship with one another – brothers and sisters in God's community!

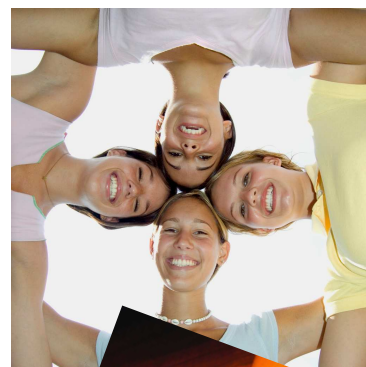


God's purpose in Jesus is to gather to Himself a people – His church – the redeemed community growing *together* to become like His Son and prepared to live with God for eternity. God's universal church on earth encompasses all those who have been born of water and the Spirit (we have sisters and brothers in Christ all over the world that we will never get to know until we get to heaven!) But it is the local church that provides the primary context for fellowship with other Christians.

Jesus' church has a simple and distinctive mission: "making followers of Jesus" (Matthew 28:18-20)

This involves teaching others about God's love and the gospel (1 Peter 3:15-16). It also involves encouraging and equipping one another for God's service (Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 10:24-25)

Jesus saves people in community. Under normal circumstances, there is no such thing as a 'lone Christian'. Every Christian is a valued member of God's family and every Christian's involvement as a member of Christ's body is important to the body's functioning as a healthy, living organism (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The church is those people brought together in and through Jesus – we exist because of who He is and what He has done for us on the cross.



The church is God's gospel community: The gospel is what saves us and brings us together as God's family. The gospel is the model for our becoming a child of God (remember your death, burial and resurrection in repentance and baptism?) The gospel continues to shape our daily living as we die to self and live by faith in Christ (Galatians 2:20). The gospel is the message we proclaim to others (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Corinthians 11:26). And the gospel will stamp its final impression upon us with our own bodily resurrection on Judgement Day – Great Day! (John 5:19-29; 1 Corinthians 15:12-58; Revelation 20:11-22:5)

While much of our life as God's children is lived out in the context of our daily routines at work and at home, God knows we need other Christians for mutual encouragement and growth (Christians need to get together often)

As a vital part of its community life, God's church meets on the first day of the week (Sunday – the day of Jesus' resurrection and the birthday of His church) to commune with Jesus and one another in a special way: focusing upon, celebrating, and declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ through fellowship in the Lord's Supper in anticipation of His return (Matthew 26:17-30; Acts 20:6-7; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-29). The Lord's Supper is also known as the Eucharist (i.e. thanksgiving), and Communion (i.e. sharing)



It is important to appreciate that the two distinctive rites (some call them sacraments) of the Christian faith (baptism and the Lord's Supper) both have their substance and meaning rooted in the gospel:



God's church – the community of the gospel!



Farewell from Theophilus

You have a lifetime journey of growth and learning ahead of you as you make your way home to our Father. Theo just wants to finish by highlighting some helpful signposts (spiritual disciplines) to look out for along the way. These are intended to keep us safely on track towards maturity in Jesus.



Bible Study:

To listen to God's message, understanding His word and submitting to His will, thus being led by His Spirit.



Prayer:

To be mindful of God's continual presence and concern and to talk with Him often. Make time to be alone with God in prayer and contemplation!



Worship:

To be living a life of praise, thankfulness and love toward God and to be serving and loving others in His name.



Community:

To be encouraging, equipping, and serving other Christians as an active and growing member of Christ's body.



Evangelism:

To be living as God's Beloved and inviting other prodigals to join you on the homeward journey to be with our Father!

